A MODEL FOR MAINTAINING CORPORATE WORSHIP DESPITE LIFE'S CIRCUMSTANCES

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ABSTRACT

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The context is Lane Tabernacle in St. Louis, Missouri. The problem is the lack of gathering in person for corporate worship. The project was entitled "A Model For Maintaining Corporate Worship: Despite Life's Circumstances." This model provided a biblical understanding of the value and importance of corporate worship among Christians. The participants were engaged in a six-week training and teaching program. If congregants complete a six-week training and teaching from a biblical viewpoint, they will gain a better perspective on being present in worship services, which will increase their attendance and participation. Pre- and post-surveys and interviews were the instruments used.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I give glory and honor to God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit for numerous blessings. Secondly, I want to thank my wife, Leila, and daughter, Ananiah, for their support on the journey called life. Next, I want to recognize Dr. Leroy Cothran, my Doctoral mentor, for his leadership and guidance throughout the program. Finally, I want to thank Bishop Sylvester Williams, Sr. for helping me to start and finish the doctoral program, as well as family and friends who have been part of the process.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my late grandparents, the Rev. O'Neal and Mary Shyne, and to my late father, Rev. Dr. O'Neal Shyne, Jr.

INTRODUCTION

"A Model For Maintaining Corporate Worship Despite Life's Circumstances" is the title of the project that has been conducted within the context of Lane Tabernacle CME Church. Lane Tabernacle is located at 910 North Newstead Avenue in St. Louis, Missouri. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Lane averaged around 130 attendees on Sunday mornings. Now, the church averages between forty and sixty persons in attendance. Some still worship through online platforms such as Facebook and Zoom, which Lane uses to stream its services. While watching online is an effective tool to reach those who are unable to be physically present, those whose work schedules do not allow it, and individuals who watch from different parts of the world, having this option is beneficial.

There is, however, no substitute for the fellowship and union of God's people coming together to worship a triune God. The issue of being comfortable watching the service from home is an ongoing circumstance that plagues Lane Tabernacle. The hypothesis statement is that if congregants complete a six-week training and teaching from a biblical viewpoint, they will gain a better perspective on being present in worship services, which will increase their attendance and participation.

"A Model For Maintaining Corporate Worship Despite Life's Circumstances" will be conducted within the context of Lane Tabernacle CME Church. There will be fifteen to twenty adults between the ages of twenty-five and seventy-five who will participate in

a six-week training and teaching program on corporate worship. The training will take place from February 2025 through March 2025. Each session will last for one and a half hours, held on a Wednesday or Saturday. Several members of the congregation will assist with the distribution of pre- and post-surveys and interviews. The material used for teaching is based on the biblical foundations research conducted in this doctoral document. The biblical passage I have chosen to observe is from the book of Hebrews 10:19-25 (NRSV), which states:

> Therefore, my friends, since we have the confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain (that is, through his flesh), and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching (Heb. 10:19-25).

This project aims to help the membership better understand the relevance and importance of corporate worship. There are a few things I seek to gain from this project. The first perspective I hope to learn is from those individuals who do not feel that the gathering of saints is important. This is vital because it will help me assess why some people are disengaged from coming to church. Not all individuals share the same reasons for not attending, so it is important to identify those differentiating factors.

"A Model For Maintaining Corporate Worship Despite Life's Circumstances" will not only be impactful for Lane but for other churches as well. This model will provide a biblical understanding of the value and importance of corporate worship for those who identify as Christians. The goal of this six-week training and teaching is to offer a better

perspective on being present in worship services while increasing a person's attendance and participation. This model aims to be used universally across the country.

Hopefully, the work done in this document will help provide future church studies with information relevant to engaging people back into public worship. The information that was found to be ineffective can be avoided in future studies. There are variables related to the different research conducted for "A Model For Maintaining Corporate Worship: Despite Life's Circumstances." An example would be the interdisciplinary research that addresses the social component of this model. This could potentially be applied to other socially related studies.

Many challenges can arise that disrupt and impact people's ability to socialize and commune together. One of the most notable challenges was the COVID-19 pandemic, which compromised corporate worship. The historical movement that I have chosen to investigate as part of my Doctor of Ministry project is the Azusa Street revival. The Azusa Street rival is important to my project because of the historical relevance that it has on worship. It is relevant that within the construct of establishing a theological foundation several components must be investigated. Understanding what worship is and where it comes from is integral to setting a launching pad to explore the various parts that make up worship. The discipline selected for the interdisciplinary chapter is sociology. The reason sociology is applicable to this project is because it gives insight into social conditions and settings that impact and shape people's lives.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

Introduction

My name is Antoine Shyne, and I am currently a doctoral student at United Theological Seminary. I was born in 1985 in Dayton, Ohio, where I grew up, and Dayton became a place to shape me into who I am today. Presently, I reside in Livermore, California. I also have a beautiful wife and five-year-old daughter. The purpose of me writing this chapter is to examine my ministry journey and the context of ministry in which my Doctor of Ministry project will be founded on. When I first started this journey in 2021, I was the pastor of the St. Peter CME church in Kansas City, Kansas. The context of my project has changed since then. The current context that will be analyzed is the Lane Tabernacle CME Church in St. Louis, Missouri. In the processes of observing my context and the things that have cultivated the skills I poses, I hope to be able to develop a project that will not only help the church, but the entire body of Christ.

Context

The current context that will be observed is the Lane Tabernacle CME Church. Lane Tabernacle is located at 910 North Newstead Avenue, St. Louis, Missouri. Lane Tabernacle's history spans from 1898 to the present. Lane Tabernacle is currently positioned between Enright Avenue and Culver Way, also known as Hodiamont Track.

Lane Tabernacle is located within the independent city in the U.S. state of Missouri. St. Louis is located near the Mississippi and Missouri rivers.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, St. Louis City has an area of 66.17 square miles (171.39 km²), of which 61.72 square miles (159.85 km²) is land and 4.45 square miles (11.53 km²) is water(xx). St. Louis city is the 115th largest county in Missouri by total area. As of the 2020 census, the population of St. Louis city was 301,565. Between 2018-2022, there were 143,059 households. The population density was 5,157.5 people per square mile.[1] Lane Tabernacle lies within the 63108 zip code, which has a population of 21,568. The population density was 9,627 people per sq. mile with a land area of 2.24 sq. miles.[2]

The racial makeup of St. Louis city in 2023 was 46.3% White or Caucasian, 43.9% Black or African American, 0.2% American Indian and Alaska Native, 3.5% Asian, 0.1% Native American and Other Pacific Islander, and 4.7% multiple races with 4.3% Hispanic or Latino.

Within the 143,059 households, 18% have children under the age of eighteen living with them, 23.1% were married couples living together, 38.4% were female householders with no spouse, 27% were male householders with no spouse, and 11.5% were non-families. The average family size is 2.57.[1] Within the 63108-zip code, the racial makeup was 54.3% White or Caucasian, 33.1% Black or African American, 0.2% American Indian/Alaska Native, 9% Asian, 0.6% Other race, and 2.1% Multiple races.

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[1] U.S. Census Bureau, "Data Census," U.S. Census Bureau, https://data.census.gov/profile/St._Louis_city,_Missouri?g=050XX00US29510.

[2] United States Zip Codes, "Zip Codes 63108," UnitedStatesZipCode.org, https://www.unitedstateszipcodes.org/63108/.

Males make up 49%, and females make up 51% of the population, with a median age of twenty-nine years old. There are 11,202 households, and within the households, 8% have children under the age of eighteen living with them, 15% were married couples living together, 10% single families, 60% singles, and 15% singles with roommates. The average household size is two with 9% with kids and 91% without kids.[2]

The educational background of the residents of St. Louis city is 21.9% high school graduates or equivalent; 18.5% some college; 6% received an associate degree; 23.4% received a bachelor's degree and 21.7% obtained graduate or professional degrees.[3] The economics of St. Louis city and the zip code of 63108, where Lane Tabernacle lies, make a slight difference due to the fact that the majority of the parishioners do not reside in St. Louis city. The median income of a household within St. Louis city is $56,245. The median income for families that are not married is $81,668, for married couples $118,243, and for non-family $43,865.[4] Sixty-five percent of the residents of St. Louis City are employed below the poverty line in 2023, at 19.6%, which includes 25.3% of those under the age of eighteen and 21.1% of those sixty-five years and over, compared to the entire state of Missouri, which was at 12%. Lane Tabernacle has around 137 active members in the congregation, between in-person and online. The age range of the membership is as follows: five to twelve (1.4%), thirteen to eighteen (3%), nineteen to thirty-five (6.6%), thirty-six to fifty (9%), fifty-one to sixty-five (23%), sixty-six to eighty-four (53%), and eighty-five and older (5%).

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[3] Data Census," U.S. Census Bureau, https://data.census.gov/profile/St._Louis_city,_Missouri?g=050XX00US29510.

[4] United States Zip Codes, "Zip Code 63108," UnitedStatesZipCode.org, https://www.unitedstateszipcodes.org/63108/.

Ministries of Lane

The Lane Tabernacle Food Pantry has been a viable ministry within the surrounding communities. The food pantry distributes food every second and fourth Thursday. The food pantry has partnered with a local food pantry and donations from the congregation to provide fresh fruits, vegetables, and meals for the residents of the St. Louis communities. Due to the overwhelming need within the community, the food pantry is undergoing a relaunch, which will allow it to expand by utilizing more resources. Most volunteers are retired members of Lane. Incorporating community volunteer hours for schools, surrounding churches, and partnering with local black owned farms in the community will strengthen their ability to serve the community. The food pantry is even looking into becoming a warming center for the community and providing warm food and space for the unhoused community during the winter months.

The food ministry was extremely vital during the COVID-19 pandemic. COVID caused the church to shift its approach since it could no longer have people coming into the fellowship hall at that time. So, they started community drive-through giveaways where people could drive to the back of the church, pop their trunks, and get a box of food. This method of feeding people went on for about seven months. The feeding ministry was altered again in its way of feeding the community. Lane observed that the drive-through giveaways started to become less effective when things in the surrounding area opened back up. People did not come by to get food in the same numbers they had been. This led to volunteers standing around for a few hours, and hardly anyone showing up. There were other churches in the area doing drive-through giveaways that impacted

this effort. The feeding ministry then decided to do giveaways every week by appointment only. This allowed them to know how many boxes to prepare for. As mentioned previously, the food ministry is currently going through a relaunch.

The health ministry is another viable resource in the community and the church. The health ministry is made up of one current, three retired healthcare professionals, and several volunteers. The health ministry provides health information through seminars and workshops. Lane also has a health clinic for the community. The Salem Health Clinic is an interfaith health clinic in St. Louis. The health clinic is open every first Saturday of the month. The clinic provides basic medical care for all residents of St. Louis. The health ministry is also undergoing a relaunch to revitalize the ministry by bringing back some of the activities that we used to provide for the community, such as health fairs, vaccine centers, and other workshops.

The health ministry was very helpful in the COVID-19 season by disseminating accurate, peer-reviewed information to the people as it relates to this virus. Most of the health ministry team are health professionals by vocation as described earlier. One of the goals during the pandemic was to encourage the membership to get vaccinated, especially because of the pre-existing conditions of the members and the community. The health team held several Zoom platforms to discuss the COVID vaccines. Another aspect of the health ministry is to help with grief among the membership. There has been a lot of loss among the members. Some have lost family members due to COVID, and others various forms of death. The health team has recognized this among the body and has developed information to direct people to the correct and appropriate resources for grief. The health

team is dedicated to helping people live a holistic life. They continue to be conscious of the various health issues of the people and the community.

The media ministry has been very viable for the congregation. The media ministry consists of four individuals who were asked to help with streaming worship services and Bible study during the pandemic. The ministry started with two cellphones and a laptop. Due to a donation from one of their homebound members, the church was able to obtain two cameras, two monitors to display worship, a new soundboard, and a laptop. The media team oversees creating graphics for service and graphics for church events, streaming on three platforms: Zoom, Facebook, YouTube, and the audio through the church. The media ministry created a process for church services, Bible studies, and church meetings to be streamed to all the members' homes.

Since COVID, there has been little to no participation from the young adults. Most of that age group are working or in school. The commitment to the church has taken a back seat while the young adults are trying to figure out life and the direction they are trying to move in. The most concerning area of the church, after conversation with church leadership, is the disengagement of worship among the members of the congregation. It was observed that although people were in the sanctuary, they were not engaged in worship. There would be rare occasions of expressive worship among the people. There would be little to no lifting of hands. It seemed that a great number of the congregation were coming to worship services out of a place of routine and not a mindset of giving God praise.

When COVID came on the scene, Lane went to an online service format because it was not safe for people to be in the building in great numbers. Now that some are back

in the building and streaming online, a good number of the members would rather stay at home and watch the service. Most of them have stated that they watch from home, not because they are concerned with COVID, they have been vaccinated, and we are socially distant, but rather, they feel it is convenient to stay at home. The problematic issue with this perspective is that there is a difference between watching worship and being an active participant in worship. The hope is that the members would come to a place of understanding that worship is important and impactful to our spiritual life and become connected as opposed to being disconnected.

Ministry Journey

There are few components that factor into the make-up of my immediate family that will shed light on how I came to be the person I am today. Although I have a biological mother, it was my dad's mother who poured into my life as a mother. My grandmother was born July 25th, 1931, in Dayton, Ohio, and was the eldest sister to two younger brothers. She joined the Phillips Temple CME Church in Dayton in 1950, where she was an active member. My grandmother was a graduate of Dunbar High School and Miami Jacobs Business College, located in the Dayton area. My grandmother was an amazing woman who taught me a lot about life and even how to treat women. She was and will always be the matriarch of faith in our family.

My grandfather was and is a huge part of who I am today in many facets of life and ministry. My grandfather was born in Claiborne Parish, Louisiana, on January 14th, 1926. He was the seventh child of fourteen children born to his parents. He accepted Christ in August 1941 at the Springhill CME Church near Minden, Louisiana. My

grandfather completed his early childhood education in the Louisiana public schools and graduated from Webster High School in Minden. He received his degree in philosophy from Indiana Central College in Indianapolis, Indiana. He also spent some time at Central Baptist Seminary.

My father was an important part of my life and development. My father was born on August 28, 1961, in Indianapolis, Indiana, to the union of my grandparents. He was raised in Indianapolis, and it was there that he accepted Christ and his call to ministry at the early age of sixteen. My dad loved to play basketball and football at Northwest High School, where he graduated from. He continued his education at Northern Kentucky University, where he graduated with a Bachelor of Science in sociology. My dad continued his education by earning a Master of Divinity degree from United Theological Seminary in 1986. In 1989, he graduated with a Doctor of Ministry degree from United, along with authoring his first book, *Preaching to Build Self-Esteem in the Local Church Setting*. In 2005, he graduated from the Graduate Theological Foundation school in Indiana with a PhD in Theological Studies.

In 2003, I graduated from Meadowdale High School and looked forward to the next step of the journey. In the winter of 2004, I started college at Central State University in Xenia, Ohio. My degree program was in sociology. Although I was excited to be in college, the year of 2004 would become very challenging for me. A few months prior to my starting college, my grandmother had been diagnosed with ovarian cancer and was undergoing chemotherapy treatments. A CME church in Dayton was about to close because it only had one active member in the congregation. My grandfather and the bishop at that time wanted me to pastor that congregation because they felt it would be a

good experience for me, so I accepted. I commuted from Dayton to Xenia, which was about a fifty-minute drive.

My grandmother's treatments seem to be going well; we had about twenty people attending the church I was serving, and my schoolwork was coming along fine. The month of May on a Friday, there were food vendors and activities taking place on Central State's campus for what they call May weekend. There were events going on all day and night on that Friday, where classmates and I attended. I had not yet been to sleep when I decided to drive back to Dayton, Ohio, early that Saturday morning around 5:00 a.m. I was five minutes away from my grandparents' house when I fell asleep behind the wheel. I crashed into a telephone pole and was trapped, but there was a lady there holding my hand, even though I could not see her. She did not leave until the paramedics arrived. When I finally came back to full consciousness in the hospital, my grandparents and father were all there. When the doctor came into the room, he said that he was surprised that I was alive and did not have any broken bones; only stitches were needed for my left arm. The doctor said the pictures from the crash site would have seemed to have suggested a more severe outcome.

My family contacted the school to inform them of the accident. Thankfully, the semester was almost over, and I only had a few assignments to finish, which my professors gave me additional time to complete. When I got back home, my grandmother helped nurse me back to strength. A few months later, the cancer really started to impact her, and the chemo treatments were becoming less effective. I had started back for the fall semester at Central State, and it seemed to be a long semester because I was watching my grandmother suffer. It became difficult at times to concentrate on my schoolwork. When

my grandmother thought I was losing focus, she encouraged me to buckle down and handle my business. On December 6, 2004, she made her heavenly transition, and her pain was over. I used everything she taught me and the sacrifices that were made to press on through college. I graduated from Central State in 2008 with a Bachelor of Science in sociology. This degree aided in pastoral ministry because it helped me to assess and understand people and the environments they grew up in.

I began attending United Theological Seminary in the fall of 2008. It started off a little rocky, and my focus was not completely on studying. By the time I started seminary, my grandfather and I were now co-pastoring a church in Cincinnati that had recently gone through a lot of turmoil. I was also in the process of planning a wedding; I had been engaged to a young lady from Indianapolis. In the winter semester, we were supposed to have a wedding around April, but two weeks before that date, she called the wedding off. I finished that semester and decided to take a year off. I knew my focus was not there and that I would not be able to perform scholastically at the level I needed to.

After prayer, support, and encouragement from my grandfather, father, and a few professors, I rejoined United in 2011. I was now the senior pastor of the congregation in Cincinnati at the age of twenty-six. My focus in seminary was now more dialed into the coursework that I had to complete. The church, however, became difficult to pastor, and my grandfather's health started to decline as well. In the summer of 2012, the new bishop reassigned me to a church in Canton, Ohio. I was currently living in Cincinnati, attending United Theological Seminary in Dayton, and then driving four and a half hours one way to Canton on Sunday mornings. That last year of seminary became rough with all the other aspects that I had going on. When I was not in class that last year, I was a substitute

teacher so that I could pay rent and survive. With the help of God and family, I was able to graduate from United with my Master of Ministry degree in 2013. My grandfather passed away in November of 2013, but he was able to witness me finish my degree program. Although there were a lot of obstacles surrounding me in seminary, it taught me to keep pressing forward and not to give up. I apply these concepts to life and ministry now.

My wife has been a blessing in my life. I met her in 2016 when I was assigned to the St. Peter CME church in Kansas City, Kansas. We were engaged in 2017 and were married on March 25th, 2018. She has stuck with me through the ups and downs of ministry in Kansas City. On June 25th, 2019, our daughter was born. They both help to keep me grounded, centered, and present a constant reminder of having balance in life.

My dad has also been a major part of my adult life. When I was younger, we may have had our disagreements like all parents and children do, but we continued to grow as father and son. In 2017, he was diagnosed with a rare intestinal cancer. He was still able to preside over my wedding along with my bishop. On September 17th, 2018, he passed away at the age of fifty-seven. I was sad when my grandparents died, but I also felt as though they had lived a full life. When my dad passed, it broke me in a way that I didn't anticipate. I am happy to be a husband and father; however, I felt at times that I would never be able to share that dynamic with him. He never got the chance to be a grandfather, and there are many days that I miss talking to him about life and ministry. I will forever be thankful for my father and grandparents and all they taught me.

I have been in ministry for over twenty-five years now, and eighteen of those years have been spent in pastoring. I have had the opportunity to pastor churches in

Dayton, Cincinnati, Canton, Toledo, Flint, and Kansas City. All these places have taught me a great deal about people and that not every church culture is the same. In most cases, the churches that I pastored were predominantly older congregations. At times, it was difficult to navigate and lead churches that were not receptive to having a young leader.

When I reflect on my professional journey there are some key attributes that have been developed in me. One area of strength is that I have trusted God even when it did not make sense to me. For example, when I was assigned to the congregation in Flint, Michigan, I did not want to go, but I went. Three months after being there the water crisis broke out because of led in the water supply. Not only did it help me trust God, but also to have a persevering attitude even when I feel like giving up.

I believe another strength that I possess is the ability to not alter my spirit of worship no matter the context that I have been sent to serve. There were places where the worship experiences were stagnant. In some situations, it seemed as there was no engagement among the people to praise God or show any kind of expressive worship. In one church, there were no drums because the people felt it was ungodly to do so. I pushed to get drums in, I was able to get them, and taught the people that it was biblical to praise God with instrumentation. I have learned how to maintain my worship in various places and circumstances of life.

Develop The Synergy

The area of concentration that I intend to explore through this Doctor of Ministry project is maintaining corporate worship despite life's obstacles. The area of worship is very personal to me and is a key component of my life and ministry. At an early age, my

grandparents taught me the value of worship. First, they instilled in me the need for personal and private worship. My grandmother would make me pray every night before I went to bed, and my grandfather would not let me go outside to play unless I learned a scripture. My grandparents would make sure I was in church every Sunday, but more importantly, that I was honoring God by giving thanks with my mouth and living out the truth of the gospel.

It is vital to have a personal relationship with God and private devotion, but it cannot replace the experience of the gathering of the saints. Robert Rayburn suggests that "we can never know the richness of worship unless we unite in common worship with other members of the body of Christ."[5] There is something that happens when the people of God are united in worship together that cannot be duplicated. I agree with Rayburn's perspective because of the experiences that I have witnessed in corporate worship. Life's circumstances can sometimes be overwhelming and cause people to disconnect from public gatherings of worship, especially in a season of a pandemic. It is important that we do not lose the connection to the transformative power of being in the assembly of other believers.

Throughout the course of my ministry, I have had several experiences that have developed certain ministerial skills within my growth that are necessary for the church. My last year in seminary, while working on a master's degree, I was relocated to a church in Canton, Ohio, while living in Cincinnati and going to school in Dayton. I drove from Cincinnati to Canton for a year every weekend. The drive was four hours one way, which would end up being a total of eight hours round trip, and sometimes the drive would all

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[5] Robert G. Rayburn, *O Come, Let Us Worship: Corporate Worship in the Evangelical Church* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2010), 29.

be in one day. Many days, I was tired and even frustrated but I never missed a Sunday of showing up for worship and preaching. There were moments when I showed up discouraged and left encouraged because of the move of God in the atmosphere of worship. The skill that was produced was the ability to persevere when not given the ideal situation, and being able to still put God first in service. If the context that I currently serve were to adopt this skill and level of commitment, then it would help in the process of making corporate worship important in their lives as well in the life of the congregation as a whole.

Another skill that has been formed in me through life's obstacles was the passing of my father. I had to learn to trust God in a different way than what I had been accustomed to. My grandfather and father played an enormous part in my cultivation, both personally and professionally. They were not only my family, but they had also been my spiritual fathers in ministry. Whenever I needed confidants and help with life, and even questions that I had about church issues, I could lean on them for advice.

When my grandfather passed away, I was at peace because I felt like he had lived a full life and had accomplished many feats in his time on earth. At that time, my dad was still alive, so I still had someone that I could confide in and that I trusted. As I mentioned previously, my father passed away several months after my marriage. It was a difficult time, and I even struggled on occasions to come to the realization of his passing. Although I had a few people to talk to about personal and professional topics, there was a huge void that had been left.

The death of my father pushed me to trust God in a new way. It was not that I did not trust the Lord before, but now I had to move forward without someone who was an

immense figure in my life. My wife and family helped me in a lot of ways to heal, but a big part of my healing came from personal and corporate worship. There was something about being in the arena of other worshippers that lifted my spirit. From the singing, musicality of instruments, to the preaching of God's Word, I was healed a little at a time. Not only would I be in public worship at my own context, but I would go to other churches to be part of revivals that ministered to my own spirit. I never stopped worshiping; I had to worship through my pain and trust that God would see me through.

Through the project that I intend to implement in this program at the Lane Tabernacle CME Church, the skills that I have acquired will help to give direction to the membership. Being able to persevere and trust God with their worship will impact the people where I serve. There will always arise situations in life that can distract, disrupt, and influence a person's decisions. Pandemics may occur, death and disappointment will happen, but we must choose to worship the Lord in spite of what transpires. These skills of preserving and trusting God can serve the people where I pastor in a positive way if they are open to using them.

The project that I want to present to the context in which I presently serve, Lane Tabernacle, is a six-week training and teaching on corporate worship. The target number of participants would be at least twenty people within the congregation. Ten of those participants would be members who do not attend in-person worship on a regular basis and the other ten would be those who do attend on a regular basis. Each training and teaching session will last at least one hour. The meetings will be held at St. Peter and the day is yet to be determined.

Those members who participate will be asked to fill out an opening survey questionnaire. The questions will consist of the following:

1. Do you attend worship service on a regular basis? Why or why not?
2. Do you believe corporate worship is important to your spiritual life?
3. Do you desire to grow in your understanding of what corporate worship is all about?

The purpose of this opening survey is to get a sense of where the participants are in terms of their thinking and feelings about corporate worship. For those who complete the six-week program, they will be asked to fill out a closing questionnaire survey. These questions are as follows:

1. Has your thinking about corporate worship changed after going through the training?
2. What did you appreciate about the training sessions?
3. Has this training created a greater desire within you to be more present in corporate worship?

The objective of this closing survey is to see how effective the training was to those who participated. This will also help in enhancing any future programs that will be explored.

The goal of this project is to help the membership to have a better understanding of the relevance and importance of corporate worship. There are a few things that I seek to gain from this project. The first perspective that I hope to learn is from those individuals who do not feel that the gathering of saints is important. The reason why this is vital is that it will help me move forward to assess why some people are disengaged in coming to church. Not all people have the same reason for not coming and so it is

important to be able to identify those differentiating factors. For example, there are some who cannot come because of health challenges that prevent them from physically being there, and others due to job schedules. However, there are those who do not have the preceding reasons for not coming to the house of worship, and that is what I seek to gain more knowledge about.

Another perspective that I seek to gain knowledge through this project is being able to use my life experiences and professional skills in a way that is productive in helping the congregants in this project. I hope that this will also help the CME church, as the need for transformative worship is necessary. Transformative worship cannot be life-changing for people if they are not a part of it. This process will also increase my own understanding of worship as I seek the knowledge of multiple sources and writers who have done great work around corporate worship.

Conclusion

"A Mode For Maintaining Corporate Worship: Despite Life's Circumstances" will be the premise of my project for this Doctor of Ministry program. As stated previously, the project that I want to present in the context of Lane Tabernacle is a six-week training and teaching on corporate worship. The target number of participants would be at least twenty people within the congregation. Some of those participants would be members who do not attend in-person worship regularly, and the others would be those who do attend on a regular basis. Each training and teaching session will last at least one hour. The meetings will be held virtually due to my geographical location. The problem this project will address is the lack of attendance and participation in corporate

worship. If the participants complete this project, I believe they will have a greater knowledge and appreciation of worship and an increased participation in attendance.

The problem at Lane Tabernacle CME Church, as stated earlier, is a lack of coming together in person for corporate worship. Lane Tabernacle is located at 910 North Newstead Avenue in St. Louis, Missouri. Prior to the COVID pandemic, Lane averaged around one hundred and thirty attendees on Sunday mornings. Now the church averages between forty and sixty persons in attendance. There are those who still worship through the online platforms such as Facebook and Zoom that Lane uses to stream its services. While watching online is an effective tool to reach those who are unable to physically be in attendance, those whose work schedule will not allow and for those individuals who watch from different parts of the world, it is good to have this option. However, there is no substitute for the fellowship and union of God's people coming together to worship a Triune God. The issue of being comfortable watching service from home is an ongoing circumstance that plagues Lane Tabernacle**.** Dianne Jones poses this question "for millennials and digital natives prefer virtual reality, then the question becomes, how will church leaders in the 21st century successfully incorporate digital religion into their ministry to preserve religion?[6]

"A Model For Maintaining Corporate Worship Despite Life's Circumstances" will not only be impactful for Lane but for other churches as well. This model will provide a biblical understanding of the value and importance of corporate worship among those who identify as being Christians. The goal of this six-week training and teaching is to

[6] Dianne P. Alston-Jones, "An Examination of the Perceptions of Digital Religion across Digital Nativity, Gender, & Race in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania during COVID-19" (PhD Diss., Goldey-Beacom College, Delaware, 2021), 3.

provide a better perspective on being present in worship services, to increase a person's attendance, and participation. The aim of this model is that it can be used universally around the country. COVID-19 still impacts our world today and according to Schallmann, "while the Silent Generation and the Greatest Generation have weathered many storms over their lifetimes, COVID-19 has challenged their resiliency.[7] Ramsuraj states, "the challenges of online courses or learning are a lack of internet access, ICT tools, electricity, poor social interaction, and others.[8]

The material that will be used for teaching is from the biblical foundations research that has been conducted in this doctoral document. The biblical passage I have chosen to observe is Hebrews 10:19-25 NRSV, which states:

> Therefore, my friends, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain (that is, through his flesh), and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

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[7] Caitlyn Schallman, "Support Group for the Greatest Generation and the Silent Generation Surviving COVID-19: A Grant Proposal Project" (PhD Diss., California State University, Long Beach, 2021), 6.

[8] Trisha Ramsuraj, "COVID-19 and Beyond: The Ethical Challenges of Resetting Higher Education Institutions' Services During and After the Pandemic," *African Journal of Inter/Multidisciplinary Studies* 3 (January 2021): 53.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

The problem this project will address is the lack of attendance and participation in corporate worship. If the participants complete a model for maintaining corporate worship despite life's circumstances, I believe they will have a greater knowledge and appreciation of worship and an increased participation in attendance.

The biblical passage I have chosen is Hebrews 10:19-25, which states:

> Therefore, my friends, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain (that is, through his flesh), and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching (Heb. 10:19-25).

The Book of Hebrews author is unknown and has been debated for centuries. Charles Swindoll emphasizes, "the book of Hebrews was probably written to Jewish Christians living in Rome around the year AD 65."[1] Nero was the emperor during this period which was a dangerous time for Christians. Cities in Rome had been set on fire

[1] Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights On Hebrews* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers 2017), 7.

under the direction of Nero and Christians were blamed for it. This caused the early believers to be on the run for their lives.

The literary context and theme of Hebrews is centered around the superiority of Christ. "The author systematically shows how Christ corresponds to each of these old-testament institutions and yet surpasses them all."[2] The writer of Hebrews list major prophets from the Old Testament and explains how Jesus is greater than them all. Jesus is the key to worshipping God in the New Testament. Thomas Long states, "that therefore brothers and sisters (NRSV=friends ;10:19), are a sign that we travel to the place of true worship together, in fact the first thing we are to do is to come boldly into the house of God."[3] Another literary view comes from the lens of Ben Witherington who says, "the author reflects knowledge of both Jewish wisdom literature and philosophical Hellenistic writings," and yet this does not prove authorship.[4]

The area of concentration that I intend to explore through this Doctor of Ministry project is a model for maintaining corporate worship despite life's obstacles. Hebrews 10:19-25 lays the foundational premise for this project. The early Jewish Christians were scattered because of the threat over their lives and had stopped coming together in temples to worship. Despite all they were going through the author of Hebrews encourages these early believers to still gather in the sanctuary and house of God to worship. This scripture gives credence to the fact that things will happen in the lives of

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[2] Dana M. Harris, "Hebrews," In *Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament,* eds. Andreas J. Kostenberger and Robert W. Yarbrough (Nashville, TN: B and H Academic, 2019), 19.

[3] Thomas G. Long, *Hebrews, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1997), 105.

[4] Ben Witherington, *Letters and Homilies for Jewish Christians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on Hebrews, James, and Jude* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2007), 42.

people, but we are still encouraged to assemble in worship. A critical evaluation of this text will further enhance the perspective of corporate worship being important in the lives of Christian believers.

Exegesis

As we navigate through Hebrews 10:19-25, it is valuable to understand the culture, setting and people of that day. There is no definite evidence of authorship as it relates to who wrote the book of Hebrews. "It was written at a time when the ages were colliding and everything in society seemed to be shaken."[5] Nero was emperor of Rome during this period, and he was a ruthless leader who was thirsty for power. This led to cities in the Roman providence being burned down and Christians being blamed for it. Christians were scattered throughout Rome on the run and hiding for their lives. Whoever the author is, Koester states, "Hebrews was originally sent to one of the small groups of Christians that gathered in the towns and cities of the Roman empire in the last half of the first century AD."[6] Peterson, Eckhard, and Nicholas argue that "Hebrews does not mean that the original recipients were exclusively Jewish."[7] Even the focus on the Levitical cult in Hebrews does not mean that the original recipients were exclusively Jewish. Both

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[5] Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Confident: Live by Faith, Not Be Sight, New Testament Commentary, Hebrews* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2009), 13.

[6] Craig R. Koester, *Hebrews: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary,* The Anchor Yale Bible, Vol. 36 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 19.

[7] David G. Peterson, Eckhard J. Schnabel, and Nicholas Perrin, *Hebrews: An Introduction and Commentary,* Tyndale New Testament Commentaries Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020), 16.

Jewish and Gentile Christians were socialized into a community ‘that required both an acceptance of the Old Testament as a record of divine revelation.

The writer of this epistle has a heavy focus on the supremacy of Christ and the priestly order of Old Testament prophets. In Hebrews, Christ is central and key to understanding the call to worship. Due to the danger and climate of the unknown these early believers had moved away from gathering in the sanctuary or temple. This is why the author goes to great lengths to highlight the importance of Jesus being the high priest. Thompson suggest, “the purpose of Hebrews is to reorient a community that has been disoriented by the chasm between the Christian confession of triumph and the reality of suffering that it has experienced.[8] As a result of their suffering some were wondering why coming to the temple to worship at all was important when their lives were in danger. Others had fallen into the habit of not placing great value on worship because they had become accustomed to not gathering. The essence of Hebrews is to help push these believers back to a relational place in their lives with God that had been separated due to the immense weight they had been under.

Verse nineteen of Hebrews chapter ten, states “Therefore, my friends, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus.” The writer starts verse nineteen by establishing there is a relationship with the people they are writing to. The author calls the early believers’ friends which gives this verse a personal tone as if they know the people on a personal level. The writer says the people have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus. Timothy Johnson puts it this way, “through the blood

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[8] James W. Thompson, *Hebrews, Paideia: Commentaries on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 20.

of Jesus, that is through Jesus's obedient offering of himself in death they have been given boldness."[9] Johnson is arguing that the point the author of Hebrews is making, is that the people should have a level of boldness because of the sacrifice that Jesus made in death. Boldness is required sometimes in moments of great trials and the pressure that comes with them. It is not always easy to be bold or courageous, but it was necessary for the Hebrew people.

Further examination of verse nineteen shows the great importance of the access into the sanctuary or temple. The sanctuary was the place of gathering for worship and because of the brutality against Christians during this period, they did not have confidence to enter the sanctuary. Mitchell and Daniel, offer some insight into this verse, "To enter" is literally "for an entrance into the sanctuary," where the noun eisodos signifies a portal for access."[10] The people should have the confidence to enter the temple because of the blood of Jesus. The assurance is not on their strength to enter but through the certainty that Christ has given to them. In other words, all boldness, confidence and assurance come from Jesus and what He has done for the body of Christ through the shedding of His Own blood.

> To enter is literally "for an entrance into the sanctuary," where the noun eisodos signifies a portal for access. The noun can be used for an actual entrance (2 Pet 1:11) or for the act of entering (Acts 13:24; 1 Thess 1:9; 2:1). Philo uses it for the entrances to the Tabernacle (On Moses 2.78, 91, 93, 94) and the Temple (Special Laws 1.156) and also for the meaning "making an entry" (On Abraham 116; On Joseph 183; Moses 1.302; 2.62). Interestingly, Philo also uses this term for the orifices of an anthropomorphized God (Sacrifices of Cain and Abel 96; Unchangeableness of God 60; On Dreams 1.235) or symbolically as the way into

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[9] Luke Timothy Johnson, *Hebrews: A Commentary,* The New Testament Library (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 256.

[10] Alan C. Mitchell and Daniel J. Harrington, *Hebrews,* Sacra Pagina Series, vol. 13 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2007), 210.

> the body (On the Creation 119). The instrumental sense of the preposition entrance is operative here. Blood featured prominently in the preceding chapter, where it was most often the blood of sacrificial animals. At 9:14 the author appealed to the greater effect of the "blood of Christ" in purifying the reader's conscience, since he entered the sanctuary with his own blood (9:12), unlike the high priest who must enter it with blood not his own (9:25). The "blood of Jesus" occurs only here in the sermon, although the author uses his name twelve other times (2:9; 3:1; 4:8, 14; 6:20; 7:22; 10:10; 12:2, 24; 13:8; 12:20, 21). The twelve occurrences of "Christ" show an almost equal preference for that title.[11]

Verse twenty states, "by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain that is through his flesh." The writer here is referencing the Christian relationship with God that has come through Christ. Jesus is the new way in which the people would approach God instead of animal sacrifices. "The curtain marks the boundary to God's presence; only those who are perfected may enter. A parenthetical comment emphasizes that approach to God is made possible by Christ's flesh, offered in his bodily sacrifice."[12] A relationship with Jesus is the only way to have relationship with God is what the author is stressing in this verse.

The Hebrew people were also receiving an invitation to be in relationship with Jesus. The author did not automatically assume that all of them were saved. In a sense verses nineteen and twenty are an introduction to Christ and a reintroduction to others of that community. The term "the way" is one in which the Jews and even the Gentiles were commonly familiar with. The Christian faith was known or referred to as "the way." The writer uses this language so that readers of this book would easily recognize the message that is being presented. Christians were targets of persecution and yet the author is inviting people to become a part of the struggle that raged on. Verse twenty helps to show

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[11] Mitchell and Harrington, *Hebrews*, 210.

[12] John Barton and John Muddiman, *The Oxford Bible Commentary* (Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 2001), 1250.

that Jesus' blood was shed for the same cause of following God's commandments and that the people could be confident in knowing what Christ had done for them.

Verse twenty-one of Hebrews chapter ten states, "and since we have a great priest over the house of God." The writer is furthering buffering their claim of the supremacy of Christ. Jesus is in charge of the house of God. God has placed all authority and responsibility in the hands of Jesus over the kingdom. Anderson says, "Christ's position as great priest over the house of God indicates his leadership over God's people."[13] Jesus is the ultimate example of leadership among the body of believers. No one else could have accomplished the will of God in the way Christ has for the people. He willingly laid down His life and allowed His own blood to be shed to cover the sins of God's people. Leaders are often required to make sacrifices that others are not willing to make. This helps the audience of the group that this letter is being written to understand the position that Christ has in God's eyes and the confidence God must give this position to His only begotten Son. The writer wants the readers to really connect with the place that Christ plays in their spiritual lives.

Jesus is not only the high priest, but the writer of Hebrews says, He is "the great high priest" (Heb. 4:14-16). Jesus is unlike any other priest that there has ever been. Jesus has often been compared to Melchizedek who was king of Salem and priest. The author of Hebrews mentions this in the seventh chapter and the strong comparison to Melchizedek is made because he has no beginning or end. Jesus is seen as being on that same order of priestly hierarchy because all the other priests have died and that was their

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[13] Kevin L. Anderson, *Hebrews: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Kansas City, MO: Foundry Publishing, 2013), 275.

end. Jesus died but was resurrected by God, and although the Bible says that Melchizedek was like the son of God, the Bible never stated that he was the son of God. John 3:16 states, "for God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." This is what makes Jesus great, superior, and above all others is that fact that He is the son of God.

It is important to observe what role priest played in the daily lives of the people. "The appointments of the tabernacle and the daily vestments of the Aaronic high priests were specifically spelled out to Moses by God."[14] The priests were responsible for receiving sacrifices from the people to make atonements for their sins. They were charged with living holy lives as examples for others to see. The priest prayed over and for the children of God. Christ covered these aspects and many more.

> This confidence in access is especially strong because it is coupled with a confidence in Christ's priestly advocacy: "since we have a great priest over the house of God" (v. 21). As we know, the appointments of the tabernacle and the daily vestments of the Aaronic high priests were specifically spelled out to Moses by God, because they were shadows of Christ's ultimate heavenly advocacy. God's instructions demanded that the Old Testament high priest wear twelve stones on his breastplate— over his heart— to represent his people (Exodus 28:21) and representative stones on his shoulder as well, for "Aaron shall bear their names before the Lord on his two shoulders for remembrance" (Exodus 28:12). Now Jesus, our ultimate advocate, bears our names not just over his body and heart, but in the very center of his being, for we are in him, our advocate! Even more, he is our constant high priest. His intercession never ceases.[15]

The "house of God" needs to be examined in verse twenty-one as well. In the physical sense the "house of God," or temple was a place where the people of God came together to worship and give praise unto God. The temple or building served as a meeting place of fellowship and community among those who considered themselves to be

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[14] R. Kent Hughes, *Hebrews: An Anchor for the Soul* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 208.

[15] Peterson, Schnabel, and Perrin, *Hebrews,* 16.

children of God, especially the Israelites. When Moses was called to lead the people of Israel out of Egyptian bondage, they built a tabernacle. The tabernacle was a tent where the people would gather under, and it became there meeting place for worship. Hundreds of years later an actual building would be built known as Solomons temple. Solomons temple was built in Jerusalem and would be synonymous with what was called the house of prayer for all nations found in Isaiah 56:7, which states, “these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offering and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all people.” However, Jesus has now taken the place of the old sacrifices and had become the supreme sacrificial offering for the people which is the point the writer of Hebrews is making.

Another perspective to note in Jesus being the great priest over the house of God is He accomplished what the old temple in Jerusalem and the other priest could not do. Christ brought people back into union with God through His death. The “house of God” is where the presence of God is represented by Christ and where worship should take place. The temple is the place where the community of faith gathers to give praise and honor to God. Jesus is not only over the physical but also over the spiritual house. The writer is bringing the greatness of Christ into perspective and many of those in whom the Book of Hebrews was written to had some knowledge of the Old Testament temple system. The people knew what they had do under the previous system in coming to God’s house and the writer of Hebrews is letting this audience know that Christ is now in charge.

Verse twenty-two of Hebrews states, “let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and bodies washed with pure water.” McKnight and Church offer some insight to this verse in this statement, “The “true heart” with which readers are to approach God calls to mind the “new heart” that is a part of the new covenant envisioned by Jeremiah (31:33) and realized through sacrifice.”[16] In order for one to have a “true heart,” means an individual must approach God through Jesus with sincerity and without hidden a hidden agenda. The writer is offering an invitation to the Hebrews especially to those who have had no previous relationship with God to now come to the Lord. The author sets the stage on how to approach a relationship with God in that of having a “true heart.” The people were also required to approach with “full assurance of faith,” which simply meant that they needed to have total confidence in the promises of God. They needed to believe that everything that God promised in His word would come true in their lives.

“With our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and bodies washed with pure water,” in verse twenty-two should be looked at closely. Allen says, “this metaphorical language of sprinkling a heart emphasizes the internal nature of salvation in contrast to the external nature of the old covenant.”[17] Allen is arguing that the old ceremonial way of people being cleansed of their sins is not the way of the new covenant under Christ. The old way called for emersion so that one would be considered clean.

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[16] Edgar V. McKnight, Christopher Church, and Christopher Lee Church, *Hebrews-James, Smyth and Helwys Bible Commentary* (Macon, GA: Smyth and Helwys Publishers, 2016), 238.

[17] David Lewis Allen, *Hebrews: New American Commentary* (Nashville, TN: B and H Publishing Group, 2010), 445.

Therefore, the author of Hebrews states it as, “hearts sprinkled” to show that it is a spiritual conversion and not a physical one that cleanses a person.

> This metaphorical language of sprinkling a heart emphasizes the internal nature of salvation in contrast to the external nature of the old covenant. It was precisely at this point, according to our author, where the old covenant failed. The “washing” of our bodies has usually been viewed as a reference to baptism. Calvin, however, rightly dissented from this, stating the author contextually is referring to the “old ceremonies of the law” where the priests had to wash at the laver in the tabernacle before beginning their daily duties. He also rightly connects the “washing” concept with other Old and New Testament passages which use this language to refer to cleansing by the Holy Spirit or the Word of God and not to baptism. 39 Guthrie correctly pointed out that our author “gives no overt signals that he has the Christian rite [of baptism] in mind,” and that the author is continuing his use of the Old Testament imagery of purification from Hebrews 9.[18]

The term “evil conscience” is in reference to having a mind that is not set on the principles of God. The writer is admonishing the people to cleanse their minds of any impure thoughts or concepts that do not line up with Christian principles. There were bound to be those who were preoccupied in their minds with the climate of immorality that surrounded this community and could have been easily swayed to act according to what was going on. It is easy to adapt ones thinking to the environment they may find themselves in and for this reason the author here is encouraging against that mindset of falling into devious thoughts. If the people were going to come or approach Christ, they needed to come with a mind that was focused on the precepts of a godly nature.

It is imperative to examine what the author of Hebrews means when he writes in verse twenty-two, “Our bodies washed with pure water.” According to the word biblical commentary, “The “pure water,” is an expression for the water used in ritual

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[18] Allen, *Hebrews: New American Commentary*, 445.

purification."[19] Priest under the old covenant washed themselves in basins of clear water. A basin is a bowl and some varied in size and the priest used them as a ceremonial cleansing of the body to represents a spiritual cleansing of their lives. The writer is once again connecting the dots of the old and using it as imagery to show the Hebrews that new way to be cleansed is through Christ.

> The expression "the body having been washed with clean water," refers to the outward sign of the inward purgation accomplished by the blood of Christ. The "pure water," is an expression for the water used in ritual purification (Num 5:17; Ezek 36:25; cf. T Levi 8:5). Moreover, the formula for washing the body is technical (cf. Lev 14:9; 15:11, 13, 16, 27; 16:4, 24, 26; Num 19:7-8; Deut 23:12 LXX). Already in 9:13-14 the writer contrasted the cleansing that affects only the body with the decisive purgation that reaches to the conscience and makes possible the service of God.[20]

Verse twenty-three of Hebrews chapter ten states, "let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful." "This exhortation to "hold fast" is important given the opposition the readers face."[21] The writer of Hebrews is encouraging the people not to give in to those are who are trying to push them back into the former way of ritualistic worship. There were some Hebrew people that were still fixated on the old customs of temple worship and had not come into relationship with Christ. When your very own country men are pushing you to a certain form of worship given the pressure they were under during these difficult times, it might have been easy to give in. Some of these Jews wanted relief and something to believe in, which is why

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[19] William L. Lane, David Allen Hubbard, Glenn W. Barker, John D. W. Watts, and Ralph P. Martin, *Hebrews 9-13,* Word Biblical Commentary Series, volume 47b (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), 287.

[20] Lane, Hubbard, Barker, Watts, and Martin, *Hebrews 9-13,* 287.

[21] Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament,* second ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 656.

some of them could have been swayed back to ceremonial practices because they may have thought this was the way to God. The author here warns against that way of thinking to admonish his listeners not to give in to this way of trying to approach God. The former way was no longer a way to reach God. The writer has already buffered his points in the previous verses by going to great lengths to highlight the importance of Christ to those who were reading this letter.

> This exhortation to "hold fast" is important given the opposition the readers face. Their critics insist that they return to the ritual observances practiced by other Jews in their city and compromise the absolute sufficiency of Christ. (Paul was not opposed to Christians engaging in sacrifices as a means of cultural identification, worshiping by thank offerings, etc.—see, e.g., Acts 21:26; but like this author he would no doubt deny that sacrifices were necessary for atonement— Rom 3:24-26. Because these readers were Diaspora Jews who probably could go to the Jerusalem temple only rarely, and no one in their community had gone to the temple since the war had started in A.D 66, it is more the principle than the practice that is at issue here anyway.[22]

These early Christians needed someone to help encourage them through this season of their lives and this is what the unknown author does in verse twenty-three. Durken states, "the call to persevere in Christian hope in 10:23 builds on the trustworthiness of God and of God's promises."[23] Durken is suggesting that the writer of Hebrews is calling the people to have unwavering confidence in God. The people were being pressured by other Jews along with facing the onslaught of assaults and attacks that were produced by those in Rome who believed the lies of Nero. The writer redirects their attention to focus in on God. The author points the readers to trust and believe the promises of God. The writer believes that if the people whom this letter is being written

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[22] Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, 656.

[23] Daniel Durken, *The New Collegeville Bible Commentary* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2009), 611.

to can conceive what is being presented to them, then they can make it through these unforeseen times.

The expression, "the confession of our hope" is significant to address in verse twenty-three. To confess is simply to acknowledge or profess a statement about something or someone. The writer is telling the people to remember what has been previously echoed throughout the history of Christianity and what has been claimed about Christ. This now becomes a personal confession for the Hebrews to confess what they believe about Jesus in their own lives. The author has already stated in the previous verse about what Christ has done for the people of God and how He is High Priest. It is now up to the people to decide if they truly believe what is being declared to them. The writer has confidence that if the people accept the truth of what Jesus has done for them then they can hold on. Their hope is being placed in God through Jesus who has been given authority over them. The hope is that they would eventually be delivered from the harsh circumstances they were under. This hope of Christ would help the people to hold on and not give up.

Verses twenty-four through twenty-five of Hebrews chapter ten states, "And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching." Mark Peters believes, "these verses should not be taken as separate charges; they are tied together as everything in this passage is tied together."[24] These last two verses are the authors final instructions to the readers and hearers of this

[24] Mark Allen Peters, "Hebrews 10:19-25," *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 53, no. 1 (1999): 62–64, doi:10.1177/002096439905300107.

epistle. Everything has been laid out in the previous verses on why these early Christians should have confidence in Christ. These verses within this pericope are a final push to move the people back to a place of united worship and coming together.

> Verses 24-25 contain the final exhortation. These verses should not be taken as separate charges; they are tied together as everything in this passage is tied together. The reader is encouraged to give thought to how to bring out the best in his or her fellow Christians. But this is best done in the context of the community gathering together for worship. "It is likely that the author has particularly in mind the assembly of his addressees as a worshipping community" (ibid., p.290, emphasis mine). It is hoped that in these gatherings the community will encourage its members to reform their behavior in light of the impending eschatological end. From beginning to end, this passage hangs together as a tightly woven piece. Its central motif is Jesus Christ as the one who has opened access to God for us. The forms of behavior that grow out of being touched by Christ's sacrifice constitute its compelling message. Not least among these behaviors is regular participation in the worship life of the community.[25]

The people are commanded to provoke one another to first love each other. "The Greek does not speak of considering how to provoke other disciples to do good and to show love rather, the author urges his hearers to consider their fellow believers with the result that they themselves will be motivated by what they see to show love and do good."[26] The idea here is that it is easier to help others by the example that one sets. There were some in this community that had more of a stronger faith than others and they needed to show those who may have been a little more staggered in theirs how to keep pressing forward. It is more effective to show action as opposed to just stating words sometimes.

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[25] Peters, "Hebrews 10:19-25," 62–64.

[26] David A. Sánchez, Cynthia Briggs Kittredge, and Margaret P, Aymer. *Hebrews, the General Epistles, and Revelation*, Fortress Commentary on the Bible study ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2016), 644.

The writer not only encourages the Hebrews to love each other but to do good. In a society and environment that needed people to show that there was still a remnant of people who were committed to doing the right thing was important. Richard Phillips says that "this requires us to come alongside other people with words and actions that will strengthen them in Christ."[27] This is what the writer has in mind in this message to these believers that was absolutely vital for them to walk beside each other and lift each other up. Jesus was the example of love that the listeners could glean from and find assurance in. Being united would also show their persecutors that Jews were strong in their beliefs and that no matter what came against them they would not lose trust in God.

In verse twenty-five, which is the final verse to be examined the writer states, "not neglecting to meet together as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see that day approaching." Hywel Jones mentions that "what is in view here includes all meetings and fellowship, corporate praise and prayer."[28] There were many who had turned away from coming together to worship God. Some had become afraid of publicly displaying their faith and belief of Christ because they would be labeled as those who had burned cities and houses in Rome and surrounding areas. The writer is letting the readers of Hebrews know it is unacceptable not to participate in public worship and that is why the invitation to enter the sanctuary is given in verse nineteen. Corporate worship is not optional, but it is a requirement that has been given to these early saints who were under tremendous pressure and scrutiny. This is also an urgent plea to the

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[27] Richard D. Phillips, *Hebrews: Reformed Expository Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P and R Publishing, 2006), 268.

[28] Hywel R. Jones, *Let's Study Hebrews* (Edinburgh, UK: Banner of Truth Trust, 2002), 116.

people because the writer is looking toward the day of Christ's return, and it was incumbent for them to be in right relationship with God.

Conclusion

The issue this chapter is addressing is the lack of attendance and participation in corporate worship. If the participants complete a model for maintaining corporate worship despite life's circumstances, I believe they will have a greater knowledge and appreciation of worship and an increased participation in attendance. Therefore, the biblical passage I have chosen is Hebrews 10:19-25, which states:

> Therefore, my friends, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain (that is, through his flesh), and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching (Heb. 10:19-25).

This passage of scripture is the basis for the Doctor of Ministry project in several ways. This project is looking at the lack of corporate worship within a local congregation. There are contributing factors that can cause individuals not to participate or come to that place where the people of God gather. Sickness, loss, pandemics, fear, and a host of other things that can happen in the earth. Hebrews 10:19-25 speaks to the absence of people gathering in the sanctuary or meeting place for worship. The writer of Hebrews is unknown and has been debated for centuries. The authorship is not what is of most importance, rather it is the message the writer is sending to these scattered Jewish people who were under what seemed to be insurmountable pressure given their realities.

During the time of this letter, to these Hebrew people Nero was emperor and was a leader whose heart and motivation was to gain power by any means necessary. Nero saw that Christianity was strong in the Roman providences, so to turn people to his leadership he burned cities and blamed Christians for it. As a result, war was launched against the people of God by Nero and the residences of Rome. They attacked and slaughtered the Jewish community who were followers of Christ. This was a scary time for those who called themselves Christians because of the level of mistreatment they had encountered due to their connection with Christ.

The author of Hebrews understands what is going on when he writes this letter to help encourage the people of that day. Worship had become almost nonexistent especially in the sanctuary because many people were fearful, and others had just become lethargic in their spiritual practices. Hebrews 10:19-25 deals with the issues of not coming together to give God glory in worship. The writer understands what the people are dealing with and yet propels the Jews to gather for worship anyway. Rittgers in his commentary quotes Leupold Scharnschlager, "because manifold deceptions are everywhere making inroads, it is necessary for the called, committed, and obligated members of Christ's body," to come together.[29] The stress here of Leupold is that same as the writer of Hebrews that God's people should not abandon worship.

> Leupold Scharnschlager: Because manifold deceptions are everywhere making inroads, it is necessary for the called, committed, and obligated members of Christ's body, wherever they may be in the world or in distress, insofar as it is possible, should not neglect the assembly. Wherever and however they may, according to the place and the persecutions, they should gather together for the

[29] Ronald K. Rittgers, ed., *Hebrews, James: Reformation Commentary on Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017), 144.

> sake of their love for Christ, be their number small or great, 2, 3, 4, 6, 10, 15, 20, more or less.[30]

"The danger of people thinking they could be Christians all by themselves was and seems present in the early church just as today and verse 25 warns against it."[31] N. T Wright is this quote is helping to highlight the problem of people gathering for worship not only for the people of that day but also for the present. That was stated in 2004 and it is 2022 and the same concerns exist today. The congregation of believers that is being observed in this project has a similar lack of corporate worship as the people of Hebrews although the context is different. There may not be the threat of Nero, but there are other things like the fear of Covid and other circumstances that arise in this modern-day context that could hinder corporate worship. The reason Hebrews 10:19-25 is so foundational to this project is because it deals with the issue of people neglecting to participate in united worship which this Doctor of Ministry project is examining.

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[30] Rittgers, *Hebrews, James*, 144.

[31] N. T. Wright, *Hebrews for Everyone: New Testament for Everyone* (London, UK: SPCK, 2004), 116.

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

The problem this project will address is the lack of attendance and participation in corporate worship. If the participants complete a "Model For Maintaining Corporate Worship Despite Life's Circumstances," then I believe they will have a greater knowledge and appreciation of worship and an increased participation in attendance. This document will be used not only to help the congregation that is being observed but others around the country.

The historical movement that I have chosen to investigate as part of my Doctor of Ministry project is the Azusa Street revival. This movement began in 1906, and according to Wickham, "the movement was created by a small group of black individuals."[1] The revival took place in Los Angeles, California and became something of a phenomenon that attracted people from all over. Robeck says that this great event in history, "is without parallel in the story of the Pentecostal Movement."[2] This revival was seen as a sign of the gifts the Holy Spirit gave because of the speaking in tongues of these small group of individuals that gathered one evening. According to Shapiro and Barnard,

[1] Anna Wickham, *That Old Time Religion: The Influence of West and Central African Religious Culture on the Music of the Azusa Street Revival* (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona, 2014), 5.

[2] Cecil M. Robeck Jr., *How Pentecost Came to Los Angeles: The Story Behind the Azusa Street Revival* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 2017), 7.

"within two years of Azusa, Pentecostalism had become widespread in the United States."[3] This movement eventually turned into an international attraction across the world. It also sparked some controversy over whether this kind of worship was acceptable by God. The debate still rages on today as it relates to what was birthed out of this movement and it overall impact on religion.

When observing the Azusa Street Revival, it is important to mention a key fixture of the movement. This important element comes in the person of William J. Seymour. Espinosa states, "in 1906, William J. Seymour (1870-1922) preached Pentecostal revival at the Azusa Street mission."[4] William J. Seymour who was an African American preacher from Centerville, Louisiana was a student of the early Pentecostal Minister Charles Parham who believed that speaking in tongues was a sign of receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Seymour arrived in Los Angeles in 1906 at a time when there was still a disparity of racial, economic and educational opportunities. Campbell alludes to the fact that, "Seymour was not only black but illiterate, which was a social elite issue African Americans spent years combating."[5] The reality is that Black people still face these issues, however William J. Seymour was perceived by some he was an interictal part in this movement.

The Azusa Street Revival is important to my project because of the historical relevance that it has on worship. My project is essentially dealing with the importance of

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[3] Stephen Shapiro and Philip Barnard, *Pentecostal Modernism: Lovecraft, Los Angeles, and World-Systems Culture, New Directions in Religion and Literature* (London, UK: Bloomsbury, 2017), 48.

[4] Gastón Espinosa, ed., *William J. Seymour and the Origins of Global Pentecostalism: A Biography and Documentary History* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 6.

[5] Marne L. Campbell, *Making Black Los Angeles: Class, Gender, and Community, 1850-1917* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 137.

maintaining corporate worship. For the Azusa Revival to have happened it was contingent upon people coming together in a worship space. There are nuances to the movement itself, such as the Pentecostal perspective that can be debated as it relates to style of worship. The point is something transformational happens when the people of God come together. A close look at this movement will help to connect the dots to the impact and the power of corporate worship. The components that helped to shape the Azusa Street Revival will be observed to have greater understanding of its role and contribution to worship.

Azusa Street Revival

"The Azusa Street Revival in 1906-9, regarded by historians of religions as marking the beginning of twentieth century Pentecostalism."[6] This revival would launch a worldwide sensation that would impact religious circles forever. Burges and Stanley quote an excerpt from the Los Angeles Times in 1906 that gives insight into how some viewed this movement. "Meetings are held in a tumble-down shack at Azusa Street near San Pedro Street and devotees of the weird doctrine practice the most fanatical rites, preach the wildest theories."[7] The Azusa revival was something that people of that time period had not been used to especially in Los Angles and there were some who did not comprehend or understand the significance of it.

> Breathing strange utterances and mouthing a creed which it would seem no sane mortal could understand, the newest religious sect has started in Los Angeles. Meetings are held in a tumbledown shack at Azusa Street, near San Pedro Street,

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[6] Peter B. Clarke, *Encyclopedia of New Religious Movements* (London, UK: Routledge, 2006), 53.

[7] Stanley M. Burgess, *Christian Peoples of the Spirit: A Documentary History of Pentecostal Spirituality from the Early Church to the Present* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2011), 241.

> and devotees of the weird doctrine practice the most fanatical rites, preach the wildest theories and work themselves into a state of mad excitement in their peculiar zeal. Colored people and a sprinkling of whites compose the congregation, and night is made hideous in the neighborhood by the howlings of the worshippers who spend hours swaying forth and back in the nerve-racking attitude of prayer and supplications. They claim to have the "gift of tongues", and to be able to comprehend the babel.[8]

It is imperative that William J. Seymour be observed to get a full picture of the Azusa Revival because it was through his leadership that this historical movement was launched. Seymour was born on May 5th, 1870, to Phyllis who was his mother and Simon Seymour his father in Centerville, Louisiana. William was the oldest of four children and his mother and father were important figures in his life. "Seymour grew up in the post-Civil war period, when Protestant Christianity, along with other institutions in the United States was undergoing growth pains associated with the increasing industrialization of the United States."[9] This was also in an era where civil rights for minorities especially black people became almost nonexistent. Although the global expansion of economics was increasing in the United States it did not provide the same opportunities for people of color. Even with racial, economic, and educational disadvantages Seymour would still go on to make a meaningful contribution to the world of religion.

William Seymour's early years were spent in Centerville, Louisiana with his parents and siblings. William and his father, Simon, were close in their relationship. "Simon had been a slave of a local lawyer and judge, Edward J. Simon, who served on the Supreme Court of the State of Louisiana."[10] While going through Reconstruction,

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[8] Burgess, *Christian Peoples of the Spirit*, 241.

[9] Douglas M. Strong, *They Walked in the Spirit: Personal Faith and Social Action in America,* 1st ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 34.

[10] Strong, *They Walked in the Spirit*, 34.

Simon Seymour's connections helped win him a seat as both a municipal judge and constable. Even though this was a great opportunity for Simon, southern politics could be dangerous and specifically for blacks who engaged in the political world. Tensions eventually begin to rise between Democrats and Republicans as well as between the African American and white wings of the Republican Party in Louisiana. On November 1, 1884, Simon was attending a Republican political rally in Loreauville, Louisiana, when he and his fellow black colleagues were confronted by a group of local white men. "Violence erupted and at the end of the conflict, the elder Seymour was dead."[11] This tragic and devastating event weighed on William very heavily. One can only surmise what young Seymour was filling at the loss of his father in this brutal death. Those who were responsible were never held accountable for their actions. As a result of all these emotions, in 1895 at the age of twenty-five, William left Centerville and migrated to Indianapolis, Indiana for better opportunities at life.

While living in Indianapolis, Seymour was given an opportunity to become a waiter in some upscales restaurant and hotels. According to Kgatla, William "became a member of the Black Methodist Episcopal Church."[12] while in Indiana. Seymour originally grew up in a Baptist congregation while in Louisiana. The Simpson Chapel Church that Seymour joined was predominately black but the larger context of their episcopal make up was majority white. Seymour's time in Indianapolis was impactful

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[11] Blaine Hamilton, John B. Boles, Allen J. Matusow, and Anthony B. Pinn, "The Spirit in Black and White: Early Twentieth-Century Pentecostals and Race Relations, 1905-1945" (PhD Diss., Rice University, 2013), 90.

[12] Mookgo Solomon Kgatla, "The Influence of Azusa Street Revival in the Early Developments of the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa," *Missionalia: Southern African Journal of Mission Studies* 44, no. 3 (2016): 321–35, doi:10.7832/44-2-156.

and gave him opportunities that were not allotted to him in the south. After five years in Indianapolis, William moved again, but this time it to Cincinnati Ohio.

> Seymour was raised in a Baptist church, but when he took up a job as a waiter in Indianapolis, Indiana, he became a member of the Black Methodist Episcopal Church. When he moved to Cincinnati, Ohio, he joined the Evening Light Saints church, which was in the holiness fold. Again, when he moved to Houston, Texas, in pursuit of his family, he became associated with a Black Holiness Church which had a woman, Lucy Farrow, as pastor.[13]

While in Cincinnati, Seymour joined the Church of God Restoration movement, also called The Evening Light Saints. This church was part of an advancing holiness movement that adopted a doctrine of faith healing and a belief in the return of Christ. They believed that the return of Christ would happen when the integration of worship happened. This theory was present throughout the rest of William's life and ministry. The Evening Lights Saints also believed in sanctification which is the process of being set a part. They contended that "sanctification was instant, not gradual and could only happen if people accepted Christ and had a baptism of the Holy Spirit."[14] Some of their contemporaries thought this was radical and way out there, yet Seymour embraced this way of thinking. It would also drive some of his later teaching and preaching.[15]

As Seymour continued to grow and develop in Cincinnati, he experienced a life altering event. William was diagnosed with smallpox, and it eventually caused him to lose his left eye. The battle with this illness forced William to reevaluate his life and relationship with God. "After recovering from this almost fatal stint with smallpox,

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[13] Kgatla, "The Influence of Azusa Street Revival," 322.

[14] Kgatla, "The Influence of Azusa Street Revival," 322.

[15] Kgatla, "The Influence of Azusa Street Revival," 322.

Seymour concluded that he had been called to preach."[16] There are numerous cases throughout history of individuals who have gone through something traumatizing, and those events propelled a desire for ministry. For example, when Paul became blind on the road to Damascus and then heard the voice of the Lord. Seymour was ordained as a minister in 1902 under the Church of God.

Seymour traveled around the country for three years preaching. In 1905, William relocated to Houston, Texas where his family had migrated to. It was good for him to be reunited with his loved ones and by this time William had matured in so many ways, especially spiritually. While living in Houston, Seymour was introduced to Lucy Farrow and eventually served as a temporary replacement pastor for her. Farrow who was a holiness preacher also happened to be the niece of Frederick Douglass. Farrow had a profound impact on Seymour in giving him ministry and spiritual advice. She would ultimately introduce William to Charles Parham who was a Caucasian man who was over a Texas Bible school. Seymour was intrigued by the notion of speaking in tongues and Parham was the one to help teach this to him. Farrow had previously worked for Parham in Topeka, Kansas. Under the leadership of Parham, the first Pentecostal Bible school was founded in the city of Topeka. That school taught that if an individual could speak in tongues, it was a sign of having the Holy Ghost. Some suggest that this is where the Pentecostal movement started.[17]

Parham had recently opened a Bible school in Houston several months after Seymour had been there. William reached out to Parham about attending the school and

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[16] Kgatla, "The Influence of Azusa Street Revival," 322.

[17] Peter B. Clarke, *Encyclopedia of New Religious Movements* (London, UK: Routledge, 2006), 56.

Parham agreed to allow him to attend. This was contingent upon William sitting outside the classroom listening to lectures through an open window. Due to segregation, Parham was afraid to cross those lines at that time. Seymour did not believe that worship should be segregated, but all people from different races and backgrounds should be able to come together. However, Seymour learned a lot from Parham's teachings that he would apply to his own form of beliefs.

Not long after learning at Parham's school in Houston, Seymour was invited to assume short term pastoral responsibilities in a small African American Holiness Church that was located on 1604 East Ninth Street in Los Angeles, California. The pastor at that time was Julia W. Hutchins and she was getting ready to travel to Liberia to partake in missionary work and was looking for a replacement to watch over her church while she was away in Africa. Seymour willingly accepted the position and, with help from Parham, arrived in Los Angeles on February 22, 1906. Seymour preached his first sermon there and talked about the speaking of tongues being a sign of having the Holy Spirit. According to Steward, "Seymour was not suggesting there existed more than two works of grace; he affirmed the Methodist two-stage understanding of the order of salvation."[18]

> Seymour was not suggesting there existed more than two works of grace; he affirmed the Methodist two-stage understanding of the order of salvation. Rather, Seymour was proposing that the baptism of the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in tongues was a completely different type of experience that could grant the believer a greater degree of power for Christian service, but which was in no way tied to the order of salvation (Jacobsen 2003, 70; Robeck 2006, 63). theology was such that he immediately began to share this new doctrine with the members of the congregation. As a result, Hutchins and the leadership of the Holiness Church Association, to which the congregation belonged, promptly ejected Seymour from the church on 4 March 1906.[19]

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[18] Adam Stewart, *Handbook of Pentecostal Christianity* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012), 44.

[19] Clarke, *Encyclopedia of New Religious Movements*, 56.

The church and Hutchins literally locked the doors to the building so that Seymour could not get in. Seymour moved to Los Angeles with the hopes of helping this pastor and congregation. He did not have much money, and the church was supposed to provide for him and now Seymour had no place to stay. God always provides for his people and Hyatt states, "the Asberrys, who lived on Bonnie Brae Street, then invited Seymour to their home where he gave himself to prayer almost constantly."[20] Although Seymour taught and preached on the Holy Spirit, he had yet to receive it or experience it for himself. It was there at the Asberry residence that he and others in that home had an experience with the Holy Ghost. This event would go on to spark what is known as the Azusa Street Revival.

> The Asberrys, who lived on Bonnie Brae Street, then invited Seymour to their home where he gave himself to prayer almost constantly. While eating supper one evening during this time, Richard Asberry suddenly fell from his chair onto the floor and began speaking in tongues. Soon others, including Seymour, were also experiencing the baptism in the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues. As word spread that charismatic gifts were occurring on Bonnie Brae Street, large crowds converged on the Asberry residence. Forced to seek larger facilities, they found an empty building at 312 Azusa Street in downtown Los Angeles. Formerly it had been a Methodist Episcopal Church, but more recently it had been used as a stable and warehouse. They removed the debris and installed rough plank benches and a makeshift pulpit made from wooden shoe boxes. On April 14, 1906, they held their first service, and revival fires blazed even more brightly.[21]

It was important for Seymour to have had this experience with the Holy Spirit because it now gave him even greater influence on teaching and preaching. It is difficult to teach and preach something that one has not had a personal encounter with the subject matter in which they are speaking of. Prayer was a big part of this movement, "Seymour

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[20] Eddie L. Hyatt, *2000 Years of Charismatic Christianity* (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2015), 78.

[21] Hyatt, *2000 Years of Charismatic Christianity*, 78.

spent much of his time behind the pulpit with his head inside the top shoe box praying."[22] Seymour believed that through prayer, the Holy Spirit had an open invitation to come into the hearts of the people. Those who attended the services gave themselves to fervent prayer. Prayer matters in the lives of God's people and helps to bring people into communion with the Lord.

After people heard about the move of the Holy Spirit, "following this experience there were people from various denominations and independent churches attending Seymour's meetings."[23] The revival continued to such that they had to look for a building that could sustain the amounts of people that were coming. The people were dedicated to helping Seymour and that is evidenced by the purchase of the old African Methodist Church building that was located at 312 Azusa Street. The congregation that once occupied that space had moved out and the church was being used as a warehouse. It was through the sacrifices of others that helped to fix the building up so that it was conducive enough to have worship services in it. "A devout Catholic by the name of J.V. McNiel donated timber and other supplies toward the repairs."[24] These were men and women who were not considered to be financially well off and yet they gave what they had to help this ministry.

There were a mixture of races and cultures that descended on 312 Azusa Street. Seymour was very adamant about people from all walks of life being able to come

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[22] Hyatt, *2000 Years of Charismatic Christianity*, 78.

[23] Richard M. Ngomane, "Leadership Mentoring and Succession in the Charismatic Churches in Bushbuckridge: A Critical Assessment in the Light of 2 Timothy 2 :1-3" (PhD Diss., University of Pretoria, 2013), 20.

[24] Ngomane, "Leadership Mentoring and Succession," 20.

together for worship. News of the revival started to spread across the nation. Lives where being changed because of the move of the Holy Spirit. William strongly thought that if people received the Holy Spirit their lives would be changed, and it would help advance the Kingdom of God. Seymour perceived that if an individual showed the ability to speak in tongues it was a sign of having the Holy Spirit. He believed that speaking in tongues represented a divine encounter with God. Seymour conceived that this encounter with God equipped people with spiritual strength to be more effective in whatever call they had on their lives. Through the guidance of the Holy Ghost people also received guidance and direction for what God wanted them to do.

The worship services at Azusa were very lively in terms of the style in which they were constructed. There were many hymns sung especially "songs like "Heavenly Sunlight" and "Under the Blood" were also popular at the Azusa Street mission."[25] There was another revival going on around the same time as the Azusa called the Welsh Revival. The Welsh Revival in Los Angeles had some similarities to that of the Azusa like the singing of hymns and exuberant amounts of prayer. The difference of the revivals is that at Azusa the songs were sung much louder and there were more rhythmic patterns in the singing. Seymour's preaching style at times would encompass "rhythmic tones that was unlike any other style that some had been accustomed to. The meetings were so powerful that they had to have three services a day and this would almost last for a three-year period. In 1907 William had the church incorporated as the Pacific Apostolic Faith Mission of Los Angeles."[26]

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[25] Mark J. Cartledge and A. J. Swoboda, eds, *Scripting Pentecost: A Study of Pentecostals, Worship, and Liturgy Explorations in Practical, Pastoral, and Empirical Theology* (London, UK: Routledge, 2016), 46.

[26] Cartledge and Swoboda, *Scripting Pentecost*, 46.

> "The Comforter Has Come" is an old Holiness song written in 1890 that regularly found its way in the Los Angeles meetings. Other songs like "Heavenly Sunlight" and "Under the Blood" were also popular at the Azusa Street mission. Sometimes Seymour would even use lyrics from a hymn to integrate into his preaching. Generally speaking, praise and thanksgiving to God were sung at the Welsh Revival whereas the themes of power in the blood of Jesus and an emphasis on the Holy Spirit appeared to mark the early songs in the Los Angeles revival. While in both revivals there was spontaneous singing without instruments, what was added at Azusa Street was the "rhythmic accompaniment of hands clapping or slapping against the thighs, or feet stomping, and the rich harmonies produced as different ones sang out in parts." It appears that the worship experienced in Azusa Street was marked by the louder and more exuberant praise that included movement beyond just singing. Increased movement in the congregants in Azusa Street likely stemmed from the African American influence. This movement in worship went beyond the more reserved expression of Welsh hymn singing.[27]

The Azusa Street Revival was spreading all over the country between 1906-1909 with pastors starting congregation adopting the same principles as Azusa. The Azusa Church even published its own newspaper that garnered national and international attention. The paper documented some of Seymour's teaching and how twenty-four-hour prayer services were held. Charles Parham eventually made his way to check out the Azusa Revival for himself. "Parham initially praised the revival, after visiting the mission he denounced its ecstasy, disorder, and racial mingling."[28] Parham had a hard time grasping what was going on at Azusa seeing the mixtures of races in worship together. He did not believe that cultures should be intermingling in church but that they needed to be segregated. This created tensions between Parham and Seymour who were once teacher and student. This culture of bringing everyone together in worship was something Seymour had longed for, but the man who helped teach him about speaking in tongues

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[27] Cartledge and Swoboda, *Scripting Pentecost*, 46.

[28] Joe Creech, "Visions of Glory: The Place of the Azusa Street Revival in Pentecostal History," *Church History* 65, no. 3 (1996): 405-424, doi:10.2307/3169938.

was tearing down his dream. Seymour rejected Parham's views of Azusa and kept teaching people about no partiality when it comes to individuals uniting to worship God.

"Between Parham and Azusa two different Pentecostal subcultures were emerging-the egalitarian, ethical restorationism of Azusa and the conservatism of the Parham group."[29] Seymour's run with the Azusa congregation started to decline with big crowds starting to diminish in 1909. One of the competing factors that caused the rapid decline was the outside ridicule of Parham and his sect of Pentecostalism. Parham was a white preacher who was respected in the circles of religiosity which had an impact on peoples thinking. Some of Seymour's followers believed in the end of the world theory of Azusa. This suggested that when all of God's people worship Christ together then Jesus' return would be immanent, and this is when some started to fall away. When they did not see the return of Christ taking place in their time frame they stopped believing in Seymour's mission. There were also problems that had started to arise within the Azusa church itself. The leaders of the church started to have conflict with one another which resulted in people leaving.[30]

The Azusa took another hit when one of the white ministers of the congregation, William Durham, tried to take over the congregation while Seymour was traveling the country preaching. The takeover was not successful, and Durham was forced to leave Azusa, but he got over six hundred members to leave with him. By 1913, there were approximately twenty members that remained at Azusa. Over the next several years, Seymour traveled the country preaching and continued to have an impact on Christian

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[29] Creech, "Visions of Glory: The Place of the Azusa Street Revival in Pentecostal History," 413.

[30] Creech, "Visions of Glory: The Place of the Azusa Street Revival in Pentecostal History," 413.

culture. William Seymour died of a heart attack in September of 1922 in Los Angeles. Seymour's wife lead Azusa Church after his death; and in 1931 they lost the building on Azusa Street. Although Seymour and the Azusa Street Mission fizzled out, they are credit with being the major influence behind Pentecostalism.

Pentecostalism

It is important to look at the Pentecostal Movement that had been birthed through the Azusa Revival. Miller says, "Pentecostalism, an expression of Christianity that dates back to the first century, when the Holy Spirit is reported to have visited a small band of Jesus's followers."[31] These early followers are said to have had the ability to speak in other tongues and heal the sick. Churches were established throughout Asia Minor which can be seen in Act chapter two. Many scholars and commentaries point to the event in Acts chapter two as the launching pad for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit because it is a major emphasis of Pentecostalism. "As Christianity became established as a national religion under Constantine and then was organized into a hierarchical structure," the followers became domesticated down through the centuries according to Miller.[32]

"Pentecostal belief almost always emphasizes belief in divine healing and personal holiness."[33] Another belief of Pentecostal is the return of Jesus which points to the last days of the world in the biblical sense. To receive healing from this perspective, one must be in relationship with Christ. That relationship with Jesus is personal. The

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[31] Donald E. Miller and Tetsunao Yamamori, *Global Pentecostalism: The New Face of Christian Social Engagement* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007), 17.

[32] Miller and Yamamori, *Global Pentecostalism*, 17.

[33] Erik J. Hjalmeby and Martin J. Medhurst, "A Rhetorical History of Race Relations in the Early Pentecostal Movement, 1906-1916" (PhD Diss., Baylor University, 2007), 2.

belief is that having a personal relationship with Christ sets the tone for personally holiness. To have a level of holiness people need to spend time in prayer talking to God in preparation for whatever direction the Lord leads in. Having personally holiness also means setting oneself apart from people, places, or things. Pentecostal principle holds that if a person professes to be a Christian, then one must abstain from things that can distract or interfere with God's call on their lives.

> Pentecostal belief almost always emphasizes belief in divine healing and personal holiness, as well, and the early Pentecostals, in particular, also had a strong sense of the imminent return of Jesus Christ to the world and an equally strong commitment to pacifism. Pentecostalism is based primarily on a shared experience, as opposed to a strict doctrinal stance or a common organizational structure, and was birthed from a revival movement, which began at Azusa Street in Los Angeles in 1906, under the leadership of William J. Seymour. Because of this emphasis on experience, Pentecostals come from a wide array of backgrounds. In fact, currently, there are dozens of denominations that call themselves Pentecostal, and there are even more individuals within mainline and evangelical denominations that view themselves as charismatic.[34]

Seymour is often credited for being the one who is at the roots of Pentecostal Movement during the 1900s. According to Hefner, "Pentecostalism is a hybrid, it united the holiness strand of European Protestantism with African American revivalism in the case of Azusa Street, and elsewhere in the Christian mission field from India to Africa and China."[35] Hefner believes that Pentecostalism presents some tension in parts of its doctrine. He contends that the problem lies connecting scripture primacy of God's Word in scripture, and the latter the primacy of kinetic ecstasy, prophetic inspiration, and supernatural healing through the Holy Spirit. These are some of the challenges that arises

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[34] Hjalmeby and Medhurst, "A Rhetorical History of Race Relations in the Early Pentecostal Movement, 1906-1916," 2.

[35] Robert W. Hefner, ed., *Global Pentecostalism in the 21st Century* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2013), 118.

whenever one looks at the notion of gender roles when it comes to men and women. There are moments in scripture when the Holy Ghost seems to impact women and men. There should not be in any segregation when it comes to the Spirit because God is no respecter of person, age, or gender.

> Pentecostalism is a hybrid, it united the holiness strand of European Protestantism with African American revivalism in the case of Azusa Street, and elsewhere in the Christian mission field from India to Africa and China. This creates competing spiritual authorities: those, usually men and usually pastors, claiming special authority through the Word; and those, also pastors but often also women, young men or old, and illiterate believers, who manifest the gifts of the Spirit. This tension frequently involves a gender dimension, because women are acknowledged as especially receptive to the gifts of the Spirit, and the current focus of anthropology on bodily practices engaging the senses as a source of knowledge underlines both the crucial role of women and the tendency for male leaders to use their control of the biblical "words of power" (and the microphone) to reinforce (gendered) hierarchy.10 It is tempting to see this as male "modernity" against female "tradition," but the reality is more ambiguous. The Bible is not just a source of (male dominated) exegesis but used performatively in Pentecostal rituals in conjunction with gifts of the spirit;11 moreover, a division in which men cultivate a rational, instrumental self while women cultivate emotions and the senses mirrors the gendered distinction in the modern West between instrumental and expressive individualism, notably in post-Christian "new spiritualities."[36]

One of the major focus areas of Pentecostalism is something called Spirit-Baptism. Castelo asserts that, "in terms of Christian spirituality, Spirit-baptism is an encounter with the triune God that is powerful, participatory, and transformative; doctrinally."[37] It is important to understand the way that most Pentecostals think about the Holy Spirit and baptism. The laying on of hands, full submergence, and sprinkling of water does not mean someone has received the gift of the Holy Ghost or even if a person has experienced it at all. The critique often comes in when trying to quantify an encounter

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[36] Hefner, *Global Pentecostalism in the 21st Century*, 118.

[37] Daniel Castelo, *Pentecostalism As a Christian Mystical Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2017), 131.

with God through the Holy Ghost. The reality is that not everyone's experience with God through the Spirit is the same and for that reason the encounter should not be put on a measuring scale. When looking at the triune part the "Oneness Pentecostalism, the term which has become the most popular designation for the movement."[38] The Oneness phrase looks at how God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost work together as one through the Spirit to help the lives of believers.

"Although the term Pentecostalism is now widely used by scholars of religion, most of them assuming they know what it means, it embraces churches as widely diverse as the celibacy-practicing Ceylon Pentecostal Mission; the Sabbatarian True Jesus Church in China."[39] There are a lot of different religious spaces that associate themselves with having a Pentecostal viewpoint. "The Assemblies of God (AG), a Pentecostal denomination, was founded in Hot Springs, Arkansas, in 1914 by men and women whose lives had been changed by the Azusa Street Revival."[40] There are numerous groups that emerged from down through the years as a result of the Azusa Street Revival. There can be things argued and debated about some of the interpretation of Pentecostalism; however, what should not be debated or questioned is that God desires a relationship with His people and for them to be transformed, which is the premise behind the Pentecostal movement. There are still present-day Christians that believe in a lot of the Pentecostal

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[38] L. Talmadge, *French, Early Inter-Racial Oneness Pentecostalism: G.T. Haywood and the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World (1901-1931)* (Cambridge MA: James Clarke, 2014), 3.

[39] Allan Anderson, ed., *Studying Global Pentecostalism: Theories and Methods. The Anthropology of Christianity* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2010), 14.

[40] Margaret M. Poloma and John Clifford Green, *The Assemblies of God: Godly Love and the Revitalization of American Pentecostalism* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2010), 2.

doctrines and a person does not have to be in any sect of religion to believe in the power of the Holy Ghost to impact and change lives.

Conclusion

The issue this project is addressing is the lack of attendance and participation in corporate worship. If the participants complete a model for maintaining corporate worship despite life's circumstances, then I believe they will have a greater knowledge and appreciation of worship and an increased participation in attendance. This chapter will be used not only to help the congregation that is being observed but others around the country.

The historical movement that I have choose to write about as part of my Doctor of Ministry project is the Azusa Street revival. "This movement began in 1906, and was led by William Joseph Seymour, the son of former slaves."[41] The revival took place in Los Angeles, California and became something of a phenomenon that attracted people from all over. Some say the Azusa Revival was the start of the Pentecostal Movement, but Synan argues that "the first Pentecostals in the modern sense of the word can be traced to Parham's Bible school in Topeka, Kansas in 1901."[42] Adamo has a different view, "one will be right to say that the origin of the famous Azusa Street Revival, which gave Pentecostalism a global fame, was not Parham's Topeka Revival but William Seymour's

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[41] Cecil M. Robeck, *The Azusa Street Mission and Revival: The Birth of the Global Pentecostal Movement* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2018), 4.

[42] Synan Vinson, ed., *The Century of the Holy Spirit: 100 Years of Pentecostal and Charismatic Renewal, 1901-2001* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2001), 3.

(African American) Azusa revival."[43] This Azusa movement eventually turned into an international attraction across the world. It also sparked some controversy over whether this kind of worship was acceptable by God. The debate still wars on today as it relates to what was birthed out of this movement and its overall impact on the world of religion.

The Azusa Street Revival is important to my project because of the historical relevance that it has on worship. This project is essentially dealing with the importance of maintaining corporate worship. For the Azusa Revival to have happened it was contingent upon people coming together in a worship space. There are caveats to the movement itself, such as the Pentecostal perspective that can be debated as it relates to style of worship. The point is something transformational happens when the people of God come together. A close look at this movement helps to connect the dots to the impact and the power of corporate worship. The components that helped to shape the Azusa Street Revival have been observed to gain greater understanding of its role and contribution to worship.

[43] David T. Adamo, "The African Background of the Prosperity Gospel," *Theologia Viatorum* 45, no. 1 (2021): 1–10, doi:10.4102/tv.v45i1.71.

CHAPTER FOUR

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

The issue this project will address is the lack of attendance and participation in corporate worship. If the participants complete a model for maintaining corporate worship despite life's circumstances, I believe they will have a greater knowledge and appreciation of worship and an increased participation in attendance. Worship is key for Christian believers' relationship with God. Therefore, it is essential that the people of God continue to grow and be in communion with God through coming together in worship.

It is vital that a theological foundation be established to show why assembling in worship is important for the body of Christ. Forest, Walter and Vernon suggest "Humanity was made to worship and this truth is ingrained on our hearts for, as Augustine noted, "our heart is restless until it rests in you."[1] Worship originated in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve in Genesis chapter two. Adam and Eve were in communion with God in the Garden of Eden, to be in communion with God is a part of worshipping God. Wolterstorff says that "to worship God is to pay reverence to God for

[1] Benjamin K. Forrest, Walter C. Kaiser, and Vernon M. Whaley, eds., *Biblical Worship: Theology for God's Glory. Biblical Theology for the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2021), 2.

God's worth, to honor God for God's worth."[2] Adam and Eve's worship was disrupted by sin. When they ate from the tree of life it was in disobedience to God and it interrupted their fellowship with Him. There are many factors that can cause disruption to the flow of worship in the life of the believer and sin is one of those components.

It is paramount to understand where worship comes from to understand its importance. "The concept of worship is as old as the Church itself, with its roots planted in ancient Judaism," according to Pecklers.[3] Judaism is described as a belief in one transcendent God who had revealed himself to Abraham, Moses, and the Hebrew prophets in the Old Testament. The first time the word worship shows up in the Bible is in Genesis 22:5, "Then Abraham said to his young men, stay here with the donkey; the boy and I will go over there; we will worship, and then we will come back to you." Worship involves an action of service and devotion to God. This is seen in Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son Issac and yet believing that the Lord would make a way.

> Humanity was made to worship and this truth is ingrained on our hearts for, as Augustine noted, "our heart is restless until it rests in you."1 Worship of God, rightly expressed, satisfies our deepest hungers and thirsts because this is what we were made for. God has revealed himself to humanity in his written Word and the Word that became flesh. J. I. Packer has said, "Theology is for doxology." Understanding the Word and the Word ultimately is for worship. For Packer, doxology is "glorifying God by praise and thanks, by obedient holiness, and by laboring to extend God's kingdom, church, and cultural influence."2 And it is this idea that stands behind the conviction of this project. We believe that theology is worship, and that worship must be theological. Therefore, biblical worship is theology unto the glory of God. Nothing less is acceptable. But what is worship, and how do we understand the way that places, people, ritual, and time play into our rightful worshiping? Two helpful definitions can begin to answer this first question, and we hope that the following chapters begin to answer the second. Daniel Block defines worship as "reverential human acts of submission and

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[2] Nicholas Wolterstorff, *The God We Worship: An Exploration of Liturgical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015), 3.

[3] Keith F. Pecklers, *Worship: New Century Theology* (London, UK: Continuum, 2003), 1.

> homage before the divine Sovereign in response to his gracious revelation of himself and in accord with his will.[4]

Within the parameters of cooperate worship there must be individual or personal worship. Bredenhof mentions, "since public worship is an encounter between God and his people" it is key to recognize the personal aspect of worship.[5] Rayburn argues that "worship is the activity of the new life of a believer in which, recognizing the fullness of the Godhead as it is revealed in the person of Jesus Christ and His mighty redemptive acts."[6] Rayburn is focusing on the individual relationship between God and people. The personal component is central to the collective body of believers coming together to give honor and service to God. If there is no personal relationship with God singularly then it will be difficult to have one corporately.

It is important that within the construct of establishing a theological foundation several components must be investigated. Understanding what worship is and where it comes from is integral to setting a launching pad to explore the various parts that make up worship. Acts of worship must be studied because it helps one to have a sense of what actions are considered to be worship. Individual and corporate worship must be observed so that the connection between why people should not forsake coming together to glorify God is made clear. This chapter will look at these various nuances that involve what will present a theology of worship.

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[4] Forrest, Kaiser, and Whaley, *Biblical Worship: Theology for God's Glory,* 2.

[5] Wes Bredenhof, *Aiming to Please: A Guide to Reformed Worship*(Ontario, CA: Study, 2020), 17.

[6] Robert G. Rayburn, *O Come, Let Us Worship: Corporate Worship in the Evangelical Church* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2010), 21.

Worship Origins

It is critical that worship be defined so that there is clarity to what it means to worship God. According to the Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary eleventh edition "worship" comes from the Middle English worship, worthiness, respect, reverence paid to a divine being. As mentioned earlier, the first appearance of the word worship shows up in the Bible is in Genesis 22:5, "Then Abraham said to his young men, stay here with the donkey; the boy and I will go over there; we will worship, and then we will come back to you." This scripture tells us that Abraham and his son Isacc gave reverence and respect to God who is the supreme being from a Christian perspective. Abraham exemplified what it means to worship God and to give respect to one who it is due. Peterson says," the worship of God's people in the Bible is distinctive."[7] Peterson is suggesting that those biblical characters like Abraham give noticeable examples of their worship. Abraham was literally going to sacrifice Issac until an angel showed up to stop him by informing him that a ram was caught in the thicket of the bushes. Worship requires a willingness to trust God even when it seems difficult.

The word worship shows up for the first time in Genesis chapter twenty-two; however, it is not the first time that worship is given to God. "In the primeval prologue (Gen. 1– 11), one encounters texts that paint the grandeur of God with colors

[7] David Peterson, *Engaging with God: A Biblical Theology of Worship* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 28.

unimagined and with insights few could expect."[8] Pierce is painting the picture that the creation story needs to be observed to have an appreciation for what God has done. Genesis 1:1-5 states:

> In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day (Gen. 1:1-5).

These verses are important to acknowledge because they speak to the divine nature of God's power. These verses furthermore illuminate the fact that God is worthy to be worshipped when one considers what God has done in the beginning of creation. When observing verses one through five, only a divine being could shape a formless earth and create light out of darkness. From a Christian perspective, it is important to understand who an individual is worshipping and why. The people of God should always know why they are giving reverence to God.

When monitoring the origin of worship, Adam and Eve should be studied. According to Gladd, "Eden is the center of God's activity on the earth, where God dwells and gives Adam and Eve his law and instructs them how they are to honor him."[9] It was in the Garden of Eden where God met and fellowshipped with Adam and Eve. If people are going to truly worship God, then there must be some communing with God. In Genesis chapter three, the Bible mentions that God was walking in the Garden of Eden. This shows that God had a relationship with Adam and Eve to be walking among them in

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[8] Timothy M. Pierce, and E. Ray Clendenen, *Enthroned on Our Praise: An Old Testament Theology of Worship*, vol. 4 (Nashville, TN: B and H Academic, 2008), 24.

[9] Benjamin L. Gladd, *From Adam and Israel to the Church: A Biblical Theology of the People of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019), 24.

whatever form God took on. This pushes the idea of what Gladd says about God showing them how to honor God. To worship God is to honor God by following the instructions that have been laid out in scripture.

In the origin of worship between God and humanity, it can be surmised that the freeness to worship was tested because of the disobedience of Adam and Eve. Before their failure, Adam and Eve had the privilege to walk with God as they worshiped Him. After their sin of eating from the tree of life, the way they worshipped God changed dramatically. Obedience is part of true worship to God, and one cannot authentically worship without being obedient to the will of God. Obedience is so important to worship that the disobedience of Adam and Eve shifted how human beings could approach God in the Old Testament. There would no longer be an opportunity to walk with God in worship which must have been an amazing experience to partake in. Adam and Eve give insight to what worship was like in the beginning of creation between God and man.

Acts Of Worship

It is necessary to evaluate worship that is recognizable to God and what actions are acceptable. Black suggests that there is a vertical relationship with God and, "in the vertical relationship, we give honor and praise to God, we offer our whole selves to God and develop a new relationship with God."[10] The question becomes what are those things that help bring people into relationship with God. In the Old Testament, animal sacrifices were made for the forgiving of sins among the nation. However, there is no longer a need for animal sacrifices because Jesus Christ became the sacrificial lamb for the sins of the

[10] Kathy Black, *Culturally-Conscious Worship* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2000), 84.

whole world. Prayer, praise, baptism and giving are a few acts of worship that will be highlighted in this section.

Immink points out that, "praise and prayer have received an independent place in the Protestant worship service."[11] Praise is an act of worship and to praise something or someone is essentially to confirm or admonish approval. Singing songs of praise that acknowledge God's being is an acceptable form of worshipping. That is why in many Protestant churches in America there are praise and worship teams that sing to help create an atmosphere for people to freely praise God. When a church and its congregants praise God they are professing that God is approved by them. This is not to suggest that God in any way needs the approval of human beings for Him to be God. It simply means that people are grateful for who God is and what God has done in the lives of God's people. Praise should always be given to one who deserves it.

Prayer is an essential component of worship. Bray emphasizes that, "Jesus therefore taught his disciples to think of God as their Father and to pray to him much, but in doing so he was inviting them to share in something that was true of him in a unique sense."[12] Prayer is how people communicate with God. Prayer is so important to the household of faith because it keeps the people of God connected to God. Prayer is constant contact with the Creator that continues to build the relationship between Divinity and humanity. Prayer is how one expresses their need to God in belief that He can and

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[11] F. Gerrit Immink, *The Touch of the Sacred: The Practice, Theology, and Tradition of Christian Worship* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2014), 15.

[12] Gerald Lewis Bray, *God Has Spoken: A History of Christian Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 449.

will answer the request of what is being asked. If there is no prayer, then there is no relationship between God and God's people.

William J. Seymour believed that a person could not receive the Holy Spirit without prayer. It was important for Seymour to have had an experience with the Holy Spirit through prayer because it gave him even greater influence in his teaching and preaching. It is difficult to teach and preach something that one has not had a personal encounter with the subject matter Prayer was a big part of the Azusa Street Revival, "Seymour spent much of his time behind the pulpit with his head inside the top shoe box praying."[13] Seymour believed that through prayer the Holy Spirit had an open invitation to come into the hearts of the people. Those who attended the services gave themselves to fervent prayer. Prayer matters in the lives of God's people and helps to bring individuals into communion with the Lord. Prayer is the lifeline between heaven and earth.

Another act of worship is the sacrament of baptism. Baptism is an outward sign of an inward change signifying a person's commitment to serve God. There is infant baptism in which the parents make the commitment to give the child back to God and that the parents would be responsible for leading and setting the example. Infant baptism involves the sprinkling of water on the forehead of the child. There is also submersion baptism in which the whole body is submersed under water.

Baptism although it is an act of worship in which an individual publicly is declaring their new life in Christ, the act itself does not grant salvation. Salvation only comes through Jesus. The writer of the Book of Hebrews points this out in verse twenty-

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[13] Eddie L. Hyatt, *2000 Years of Charismatic Christianity* (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2015), 78.

two of Hebrews which states, “let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and bodies washed with pure water.” McKnight and Church offer some insight to this verse in this statement, “The “true heart” with which readers are to approach God calls to mind the “new heart” that is a part of the new covenant envisioned by Jeremiah (31:33) and realized through sacrifice.”[14] In order for one to have a “true heart,” means an individual must approach God through Jesus with sincerity and without a hidden agenda.

“With our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and bodies washed with pure water,” in verse twenty-two should be viewed closely. Allen says, “this metaphorical language of sprinkling a heart emphasizes the internal nature of salvation in contrast to the external nature of the old covenant.”[15] Allen is arguing that the old ceremonial way of people being cleansed of their sins is not the way of the new covenant under Christ. The old way called for emersion so that one would be considered clean. Therefore, the author of Hebrews states it as, “hearts sprinkled” to show that it is a spiritual conversion and not a physical one that cleanses a person. This is important to understand so that people have the correct perspective about baptisms. Most baptisms within mainline Protestant denominations usually have the sacrament of baptism during the worship service.

Giving of tithes and offering are considered to be acts of worship that display one’s devotion and commitment to God. Christopher pushes this point when he states, “it

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[14] Edgar V McKnight, Christopher Church, and Christopher Lee Church, *Smyth and Helwys Bible Commentary: Hebrews-James* (Macon, GA: Smyth and Helwys Publishers, 2016), 238.

[15] David Lewis Allen, *Hebrews*: *New American Commentary* (Nashville, TN: B and H Publishing Group, 2010), 445.

should never be about getting more money but always be helping persons grow to trust God more and it will be that trust that brings them ultimate joy and fulfilment."[16] Christopher has a valid perspective when it comes to the heart of giving because when a person gives their tithe or offering it should be out of a place of trusting God. The act of giving money can sometimes be a challenge especially when a person may not have excessive resources to draw from. This is where the trust factor comes in believing that when you give to the work of ministry then God will honor that willingness to trust Him. It is not how much one gives that moves God; it is the sacrifice that it cost the individual who gave that pleases the Lord. Giving is a part of worship and should always be understood in that light.

Personal Worship

The title of this project is, "A Model For Maintaining Corporate Worship Despite Life's Circumstances." Before people can come together in corporate worship, there must be an individual or personal commitment to worship God. There should be a personal relationship with God for each person who comes before God's presence. Snape presents a great thought when he says, "the human being is hard-wired to worship and at the very essence of the human condition is the need and desire to worship."[17] Isaiah 43:21 says, "the people whom I formed for myself so that they might declare my praise." Here scripture teaches that God created human beings to give him acknowledgement.

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[16] J. Clif Christopher, *The Church Money Manual: Best Practices for Finance and Stewardship* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2014), 51.

[17] Daniel Patrick Snape*, Worship, Theology, and Praxis at Antioch Community Church of Waltham, Massachusetts: An Exploration of the Foundations of Worship from a Baptist-Charismatic Perspective* (Boston, MA: Boston University, 2017), 42.

Essentially that is what praise is, to give recognition to something or someone. Therefore, there is an innate craving and desire to worship; however, that desire can often be channeled in the wrong direction when a person is not in right relationship with God through Jesus. People can start to worship other things when they do not have that personal relationship with the Creator.

Acts of worship should be factored into one's personal worship. Daniel suggests, "humans have within them the innate capacity to worship and adore. Humans do, however, need to be taught how to worship biblically."[18] It should never be assumed that humanity fully knows how to worship God the way God desires to be worshiped and adored. That is why a correct understanding of some acts of worship have been observed earlier. Every human being is responsible for his or her own acts of worship when it comes to serving God. The issue that has often appeared within society and especially the Christian church is that many people believe they can worship God how they want to. The problem with that kind of thinking is that God has commanded humanity to worship him in specific ways. One of those ways is through prayer that was mentioned previously. Prayer is talking and communicating with God. For example, if you have a personal relationship with someone, it is essential for the two parties to talk so that the relationship can continue to grow. God desires to be in constant communion with God's people.

How people understand the meaning of worship will ultimately impact how they chose to worship God. Whaley's view is this, "Jesus' statement is the best definition of worship. Our Lord called his definition the greatest commandment "Love the Lord thy

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[18] Jimmy Wayne Daniel, "Equipping Students with a Biblical Theology of Worship at First Baptist Church Centerton and Life Way Christian School in Centerton, Arkansas," (PhD diss, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, 2017), 8.

God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength" (Mk. 12:30).[19] Having a deep love for God is important for those who endeavor to really serve Him. When an individual truly loves something or someone they try to give their best.

> Jesus' statement is the best definition of worship. Our Lord called his definition the greatest commandment: "you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength" (Mk. 2:30). Worship of God motivates us to change the way we live, because . . . Worship is formational —shaping us as fully devoted followers of Christ. Worship is transformational —changing us from old to new, dead to living. This kind of worship is what we experience every time we enter the presence of God. He changes us from the inside out. Worship is relational —strengthening our bond with Christ (our upward relationship) and with other people (our horizontal relationship). Worship is missional —demonstrated by our commitment to love our neighbor, tell our story about God, and take the gospel to the nations. Worship is reproducible —motivating us to teach and train others to worship in spirit and in truth. Sometimes our worship is measured by repentance —confessing our sins, asking for forgiveness, and determining to do that which is right and good. At times, true worship is measured by new insights we learn about God as we look into his face and the things of earth.[20]

It is necessary to take personal worship seriously so that one grows and matures in their daily walk with Christ. "In order to draw close to God, to understand his grace and love, we must also understand our need for God," says McMinn.[21] McMinn makes a valid statement because worship is not only about giving honor and praise to God, but it is also about the individual receiving something as well. Boone expresses, "the more we cherish our relationship with him, the greater should be our desire to worship to the

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[19] Vernon M. Whaley, *Worship Through the Ages: How the Great Awakenings Shape Evangelical Worship*. (Nashville, TN: B and H Publishing Group, 2012), 12.

[20] Whaley, *Worship Through the Ages,* 12.

[21] Mark R. McMinn, *Psychology, Theology, and Spirituality in Christian Counseling* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Incorporated, 2012), 41.

fullest of our ability."[22] When people give their all to God in personal worship then they receive a return that impacts them internally. If humanity has a craving and desire to worship something or someone, then having that personal connection with God should help feed that appetite.

The reason personal worship is so valuable to the Christian believer is because it is not only about just that one person, but about that one person being able to reach multiple people for Christ. Wilson states, "that when John Wesley's heart was strangely warmed, Wesley's life was transformed so that he set about the task of bringing the world to Christ with whole-hearted enthusiasm."[23] The goal in worship for the individual is not just about personal transformation, but about helping to lead others to God through one's own relationship. Knowing God for oneself can help others who may be searching for that personal connection with the Divine. There must be individual worship before there can be corporate worship.

Corporate Worship

The primary premise of this document is to bring awareness to the lack of participation and attendance in worship services within the context of Beebe Memorial Cathedral CME Church. The writer of Hebrews addresses this problem with the people of that biblical time. Hebrews 10:25 says, "not neglecting to meet together as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see that day approaching."

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[22] Jerome Boone, Jerald J. Daffe, William Effler, and Henry Smith, eds., *Mission of the Church: Essays on Practical Theology for 21st Century Ministry* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2018), 99.

[23] Kenneth Wilson, *Methodist Theology: Doing Theology* (London, UK: T and T Clark International, Bloomsbury Publishing Place, 2011), 13.

Hywel Jones mentions that "what is in view here includes all meetings and fellowship, corporate praise and prayer."[24] There were many who had turned away from coming together to worship God. Some had become afraid of publicly displaying their faith and belief of Christ because they would be labeled as those who had burned cities and houses in Rome and surrounding areas. The writer is letting the readers of Hebrews know it is unacceptable not to participate in public worship and that is why the invitation to enter the sanctuary is given in verse nineteen. Corporate worship is not optional, but it is a requirement that has been given to these early saints who were under tremendous pressure and scrutiny. This is also an urgent plea to the people because the writer is looking toward the day of Christ's return, and it was incumbent for them to be in right relationship with God.

There is a lack of consistency in the body of Christ in many Protestant congregations when it comes to people commencing in one space to honor God together. Not every worship service is the same; however, there should be a coming together of God's people regardless of the denomination affiliation. Sometimes if a person is going to follow the biblical mandate of corporate worship, then it requires some sacrifice. This is where a person's theological understanding of God comes into account. If one does not have high value or believes, they can approach God in any way, they are less likely to heed to God's word. Therefore, worshiping God in the way God requires and deserves is less plausible to happen.

There is also the danger of gathering in the sanctuary, or meeting space and still not have truly given God worship. Vanhoozer submits that, "focusing on the right object

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[24] Hywel R. Jones, *Let's Study Hebrews* (Edinburgh, UK: Banner of Truth Trust, 2002), 116.

is everything in worship. Ignorant worship fails to invigorate or to quench our spiritual thirst."[25] This is a powerful statement from Vanhoozer because there are many times people can come to worship service with the wrong perspective and miss out on the presence of God. Hardin's view in my opinion is correct when he states, "the worship of a holy, triune God is the primary function of corporate worship."[26] What Hardin mentions is the essence of what corporate worship is all about. It is vital to have a personal relationship with God and private devotion, but it cannot replace the experience of the gathering of the saints. It is vital to have a personal relationship with God and private devotion, but it cannot replace the experience of the gathering of the saints. Robert Rayburn suggests that "we can never know the richness of worship unless we unite in common worship with other members of the body of Christ."[27]

Corporate worship is not only about giving praise, honor, and glory to God, but it also creates community among believers. Garrigan says, "places of worship remain among the few venues where there is at least the potential to be involved in a corporate process of social commentary."[28] Garrigan makes a relevant statement because coming together allows social interaction with one another. In a corporate setting, one may encounter people who come from different backgrounds in life. There may be individuals who are not of the same ethnicity that are in the space of worship. It may also be people

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[25] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Pictures at a Theological Exhibition: Scenes of the Church's Worship, Witness, and Wisdom* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 104.

[26] Brandon James Hardin, "Equipping Biblical Studies and Christian Ministry Students at Blue Mountain College with a Biblical Theology of Corporate Worship" (Diss, Boyce Digital Library, 2020), 33.

[27] Rayburn, *O Come Let Us Worship*, 29.

[28] Siobhán Garrigan, "Theology, Habermas and Corporate Worship," *The Irish Review (1986-)* 32, no. 32 (2004): 39–52, doi:10.2307/29736244.

who might have cultural differences. Typically, people tend to worship in a setting that is culturally familiar to them which is not always the case. There are multi-cultural worship services that bring people from all walks of life together. When this gathering of people convenes, it creates opportunity for individuals to connect on a social level together after they have engaged in the primary reason for being in that space. It is good for people to know something about those whom they are worshipping with.

Corporate worship within the context of Beebe Memorial is not the only church that has challenges with getting people to gather. There are many churches and denominations across the country who had to deal with this challenge especially after the Covid-19 pandemic. Most people would rather stay at home and watch service online. Ferdinand in his empirical research records a participant stating, "Virtual worship doesn't enable me to have community with believers and fully participate in all liturgical aspects."[29] There is nothing wrong with virtual worship; however, it could never have the same impact on people as corporate worship.

Conclusion

The problem this project is addressing is the lack of attendance and participation in corporate worship. If the participants complete a "Model For Maintaining Corporate Worship Despite Life's Circumstances," I believe they will have a greater knowledge and appreciation of worship and an increase in attendance will occur. Worship is vital for the

[29] Ferdinand P. Kruger, "Descriptive Empirical Perspectives on Participants' Attitudes on Virtual Worship Services Kindle an Ineluctable Revisiting of Ecclesial Assumptions in a Post-Pandemic World," *HTS Teologiese Studies/ Theological Studies* 77, no. 4 (2021): 11, doi:10.4102/hts.v77i4.7125.

Christian believers' relationship with God. Therefore, it is essential that the people of God continue to grow and be in communion with God by coming together in worship.

It is critical that a theological foundation be established to prove why assembling in worship is important for the body of Christ. Forest, Walter and Vernon state "humanity was made to worship and this truth is ingrained on our hearts for, as Augustine noted, "our heart is restless until it rests in you."[30] Worship originated in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve in Genesis chapter two. Adam and Eve had been in communion with God in the Garden of Eden, to be in communion with God is a part of worshipping God. Wolterstorff says that "to worship God is to pay reverence to God for God's worth, to honor God for God's worth."[31] Adam and Eve's worship was disrupted by sin. When they ate from the tree of life, it was in disobedience to God and it interrupted their fellowship with God. There are many things that can cause disruption to the flow of worship in the life of the believer and sin is one of those components. Having a correct theological understanding of God will help people with their worship.

It is essential to understand where worship originates from to understand its importance. As mentioned earlier "the concept of worship is as old as the Church itself, with its roots planted in ancient Judaism" according to Pecklers.[32] Judaism is a belief in one transcendent God who had revealed himself to Abraham, Moses, and the Hebrew prophets in the Old Testament. The first time the word worship shows up in the Bible is in Genesis 22:5, "Then Abraham said to his young men, stay here with the donkey; the

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[30] Forrest, Kaiser, and Whaley, *Biblical Worship: Theology for God's Glory,* 2.

[31] Wolterstorff, *The God We Worship*, 3.

[32] Pecklers, *Worship: New Century Theology*, 1.

boy and I will go over there; we will worship, and then we will come back to you." Worship requires an action of service and devotion to God. This is seen in Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son Issac and yet believing that the Lord would make a way.

It is relevant that within the construct of establishing a theological foundation several components must be investigated. Understanding what worship is and where it comes from is integral to setting a launching pad to explore the various parts that make up worship. Acts of worship must be studied because it helps one to have a sense of what actions are considered to be worship. Individual and corporate worship must be observed so that the connection between why people should not forsake coming together to glorify God is made clear. This research has evaluated several perspectives that will present a theology of worship. When people truly and authentically know what worship is about, they will have a greater sense of devotion and reference to God. That is the goal of this document to bring a greater awareness to the importance of corporate worship.

CHAPTER FIVE

INTERDISCIPLINARY FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

The problem within the context where I serve is the lack of attendance and participation in corporate worship. The title of this project is a "Model For Maintaining Corporate Worship Despite Life's Circumstances." I believe if the people go through this model they will have a greater knowledge and appreciation of worship and an increased participation in attendance. Worship is key for Christian believers' relationship with God. Therefore, it is essential that the people of God continue to grow and be in communion with God by coming together in worship.

The interdisciplinary that has been chosen is sociology. Sociology is the study of groups and people within a society. Bankston states, "Sociologists study social life. This means that they concern themselves with the social groups that exist apart from the individuals within them, into which people are born and out of which they die."[1] The reason sociology is applicable to this project is because it gives insight into social conditions and settings that impact and shape people's lives. Cultural, ethnic and environment can have influence on the way in which individuals see God. The way one views God will determine how they respond in their devotion and service to God.

[1] Carl L. Bankston, *Sociology Basics: Magill's Choice* (Pasadena, CA: Salem Press, 2000), 2.

The "Journal of Applied Social Sciences" argues that factors societies must contend with "are demographic, political, economic, social, cultural, technological, and environmental challenges."[2] This journal makes some valid points because it gives credence to things that are in society that can cause disruption to people and groups. The intent of this research is to be centered around creating an awareness on the importance of coming together to worship God. There are, however, nuances that must be considered that can hinder human beings from convening in a space of worship. For example, a family that wants to go to a particular church may not have adequate transportation to get there. This would create an economic issue that would hinder people from going to a particular church.

> Sociologists study social life. This means that they concern themselves with the social groups that exist apart from the individuals within them, into which people are born and out of which they die. Sociologists look at how people are influenced by their cultures, by the beliefs, values, and ways of acting that they receive from other members of their groups. These social scientists consider how groups transmit cultural traits to individuals through socialization. Sociologists study how the ways in which people work together or compete with one another lead to varying consequences for individuals in different social positions. Sociologists examine institutions, established ways of meeting fundamental human needs through social interaction. Family life, economies, and political systems are all institutions that enable people to perform their basic shared tasks. Those who study sociology investigate how individuals involve themselves in the social world through interaction with others and through interpretation of the actions of others. Many of the ideas and techniques of sociology overlap with those of other behavioral sciences, including psychology, economics, political science, geography, and history.[3]

Religion helps to model different groups in society whether they are Christian or not. Veronique and Woods highlight that, "sociology of post secularity views religion as

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[2] Roberta Spalter-Roth, "A Sociologists in Research, Applied, and Policy Settings: Bringing Professionals in from the Cold," *Journal of Applied Social Science* 1, no. 2 (2007): 1.

[3] Spalter-Roth, "A Sociologists in Research, Applied, and Policy Settings," 1.

an autonomous actor in society."[4] This notion of having freedom of religion is true in the United States, but that is not the case in some countries in the world. The same can be said about individual family groups even in the U.S. that being in a particular family may not give a person full autonomy to select what religion they might fall under. Understanding where and how one is raised sheds a lens on their ideological and theological framework. This is why Joachim argues, "the influence of religion, sociologically speaking, then, is twofold: there is a positive or cohesive integrating influence and there is a negative, destructive, disintegrating influence."[5] There are many religions within society that can have affect the way people live and think. The premise of this research, however, is to help push people to reengage back to the gathering of Christian or Christ centered worship.

The role that the Church plays within a society especially in the United States is not just one of religiosity but that brings moral awareness. Dart's take is "beyond the importance of meeting spiritual needs, the Church historically has been a type of social barometer for determining the types of national values and morals needed within the various cultures in most western societies."[6] Even though the Church is a barometer for helping shape national values does not mean that society will always heed certain morals and values. Sometimes, the Christian Church might take different positions on moral and political issues. There are conservative and liberal views on abortion and whether it is

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[4] Véronique Altglas and Matthew Wood, eds., "Bringing Back the Social into the Sociology of Religion: Critical Approaches," in *Studies in Critical Research on Religion*, vol. 8 (Leiden, UK: Brill, 2018), 2.

[5] Joachim Wach, "Sociology of Religion," vol. 16 (Abingdon, VA: Routledge, 2019), 36.

[6] Angelo O. Dart and Regent University School of Divinity, "Who Shall Separate Us?: A Socio-Theological Comparison Study Identifying Factors Facilitating Multicultural Health for the Congregation of the Church of God World Outreach Worship Center in Newport News, Virginia," 2014, 1.

right or wrong. If the sociological perspective is going to be observed, then there are several areas that need to be studied. The disciplines of sociology investigated are social organization, social psychology, social change, and human ecology. These several areas of study will help to provide insight to the various sociological factors that can determine and impact how individuals interact that will influence the way they might worship God.

Social Organization

Social organization is essentially the study of organized groups of people particularly business, associations, and non-profits. What prompted this study within sociology was the charity organization movement that started in London and came to the United States in the 1870s. "As their name suggests, charity organization societies aimed to coordinate the efforts of existing charities according to rational, scientific principles, not simply to dispense alms."[7] Organized groups within society can have huge influence on political, economic, and cultural baring's on the people who are a part of that society. One factor that can impact a community is when small businesses move out of certain neighborhoods for various reasons. These small businesses are normally connected to the needs of the people in that community. Social organizations can either help or hurt the society in which they are a part of.

The Church is labeled in the category of a non-profit organization. According to the Social Enterprise Alliance, "mission is the heart of a nonprofit. Unless a nonprofit's social venture is truly aligned with its mission, the venture is just another business, albeit

[7] Dawn M. Greeley, *Beyond Benevolence: The New York Charity Organization Society and the Transformation of American Social Welfare, 1882-1935* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2022), 3.

one owned and operated by a nonprofit entity."[8] There are business elements to any Church, however, the Church is not a business. The mission of the Church regardless of denomination is found in Matthew 28:19-20, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Since groups in society tend to associate with organizations that fits their needs then the Church must make sure that it is functioning in the God given purpose. "The desirable integration between theological justice and political justice is rendered possible only within the boundary of the true church."[9] Although people in society affiliate with different political groups such as the democratic or the republican party it is vital that the Church remains on the side of what is right in the sight of God. Duncan argues that "the Christian church in America, in its slow and often lurching way, is taking its cues from its members. Right now, its members are at their most divided in modern political history."[10] When a Church holds a certain political view on issues that people within its congregation do not agree with then it can cause those individuals to disassociate with that congregation. People often go to Churches that fits their political needs whether it is theologically right or wrong.

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[8] Social Enterprise Alliance*, Succeeding at Social Enterprise: Hard-Won Lessons for Nonprofits and Social Entrepreneurs* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, 2010), 22.

[9] Ilsup Ahn, *The Church in the Public: A Politics of Engagement for a Cruel and Indifferent Age* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2022), 21.

[10] Lenny Duncan, *Dear Church: A Love Letter from a Black Preacher to the Whitest Denomination in the U.S.* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2019), 4.

When studying social organizations in society economics plays a major role in what organization people will try to be a part of. "The ever-widening gap between the haves and the have-nots, between the modern-day Egyptian elites and marginalized Hebrews, wreaks havoc on our communities."[11] Some groups of people only attend churches with a certain status like congregations with large memberships. It is typically assumed that mega Churches have money and influence; therefore, people who are in a high economic class want to be identified in circles that match their social status including the Church. These broad misconceptions of status in the church can make people feel inferior and not want to be a part of that congregation.

The observation of social organizations helps one to understand the various complexities that make up society's groups. The Church falls into the category of a social organization which can have an impact on the community in which it serves. "Historically, sociologists of religion focused on questions about religion's relationship to society at large: where religion comes from, how religion contributes to social stability, and how it can create social change."[12] Religion is vastly spread throughout society. There are different religions and not everyone ascribes to the same belief systems and that will shape what groups and organizations people belong to. Sometimes people will change religious belief systems which will cause them to switch the church they attend or even leave all together. The premise of this chapter is to help people reengage into corporate worship not only within the context of Beebe Memorial but in other Churches

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[11] Patrick B. Reyes, *The Purpose Gap: Empowering Communities of Color to Find Meaning and Thrive* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2021), 27.

[12] Grace Yukich and Penny Edgell, eds., *Religion Is Raced: Understanding American Religion in the Twenty-First Century* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2020), 3.

as well. Monitoring social organization can shed light on what proponent's shape people and their decision making on what Church they will attend.

Social Psychology

Social Psychology is a discipline that is a part of the field of study within sociology. "We define social psychology as the systematic study of the nature and causes of human social behavior."[13] There are a few components of social psychology that should be viewed to get an accurate description of its importance to sociology. Human behavior, human interaction, and personal activities are some components that make up the study of social psychology. These components will help to identify psychological factors that can determine why an individual might belong to a particular group of people. These factors can also give credence to why someone might have a certain religious affiliation. There are determining elements within society that can affect one's behavior. The cultural setting into which a person is born will have some impact on them. Human behavior is developed through the environment that an individual is a part of. In most cases, a child will mimic the behavior of the parents in the home in which they are being raised. This is learned behavior. So, if a child grows up in an environment where the parents to go to Church or even show some connection to God then most likely that child will adopt that way of thinking.

Lim asserts "people respond to stimulations that they receive, and these psychological factors explain the complexity of human behavior, the effects on human

[13] John D. DeLamater, Daniel J. Myers, and Jessica L. Collett, *Social Psychology* (New York, NY: Westview Press, 2015), 3.

relationship, and the activities of a society/ community."[14] People can be stimulated by their belief system which in some aspect will contribute to their behavior within society. That is why the Church plays a huge role in the psychological part of people's life. Even though there is a spiritual part of Christian worship that is the fundamental and the theological foundation there is also an intellectual component. What is in a person's mind can affect their behavior in society and that can either be positive or negative. The Church has a responsibility to make sure that the truth of God's Word is being presented because it will impact lives and communities.

> The study of human behavior and relationality as a social phenomenon finds an academic home in social psychology. Psychological explanations clarify the dynamics behind every social phenomenon and human behavior (Serge Moscovici, 1991). People respond to stimulations that they receive, and these psychological factors explain the complexity of human behavior, the effects on human relationship, and the activities of a society/ community. And while social phenomena may be studied variously (such as collective intentionality, social ontology, social epistemology, and critical social theory), these studies may also be classified under the domain of sociality (Weissman, 2000; Tuomela, 2007; Goldman and Whitcomb, 2011). Implicitly, the taxonomy of sociality acknowledges the psychological dynamics underlying social behaviors and actions, and thus, it is possible to locate social psychology as the home for studying sociality.[15]

Social interaction is very important in the make-up of society. Social interaction among human beings creates fellowship and community. Corporate worship for Christian believers provides opportunity for fellowship with one another. Argyle, Michael, and Benjamin point out "church membership is a widely used index and as an index it is rather unsatisfactory since it tells us very little about how active a person is or what he

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[14] Timothy Teck Ngern Lim, *Ecclesial Recognition with Hegelian Philosophy, Social Psychology, and Continental Political Theory: An Interdisciplinary Proposal* (Leiden, UK: Brill, 2017), 63.

[15] DeLamater, Myers, and Collett, *Social Psychology*, 3.

believes."[16] A great number of church rosters do not accurately reflect the actual number of active members of that congregation. It is difficult to measure from a psychological perspective what a member of the Church thinks without social interaction. A pastor or leader in any context will never truly know the feelings, thoughts, and concerns of those they govern without having any interaction with them. In a society that has become more and more driven by technology, it is important not to lose human interaction.

The psychological make-up of every community is extremely valuable to the overall health of that community. How people view and see the world will ultimately impact how they act in society. The Church has a major task in making sure that it presents the authentic truth of the Word of God to a world that needs to hear it. "Human social interaction thus reflects our created goodness, our corrupted condition, and functions, potentially, within God's redemptive plan."[17] When the people of God gather corporately, they accomplish social interaction because they are communing with one another. Worshipping with others also creates social activity because worship requires active praise from the people. The study of social psychology is perennate to understanding why groups of people think and act the way that they do in society. It can even give a glimpse into why there are some who do not feel it is valuable to participate in public worship.

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[16] Michael Argyle, and Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi, *The Social Psychology of Religion (Psychology Revivals)* (Hoboken, NJ: Taylor and Francis, 2013), 2.

[17] Angela M. Sabates, *Social Psychology in Christian Perspective: Exploring the Human Condition* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 2012), 49.

Social Change

Social Change as a discipline of sociology is essentially the study of factors in society that have created change within societies. Thomas mentions, "social movements appeared and disappeared, were tolerated or crushed, became popular or remained in the margins, and influenced society in the long run or merely effected temporary change."[18] An example of social change that impacted society is the Azusa Street revival.

This movement began in 1906, and according to Wickham, "the movement was created by a small group of black individuals."[19] The revival took place in Los Angeles, California and became something of a phenomenon that attracted people from all over. This movement eventually turned into an international attraction across the world. The Azusa Street revival sparked conversation on how people viewed worship.

Social change in the scope of the Church is diverse. Thompson states, "the development of black congregations as forms of institutional identity for African Americans from the end of the nineteenth century through the first half of the twentieth century and the growing sense that social change might include desegregation for white congregations are why eleven o'clock on Sunday morning continues to be the most segregated hour in America."[20] The Church has remained at the front of social change for a long time. In the 1960s at the height of the civil rights movement people like Martin Luther King, Jr. and John Lewis led the way in pricking the social consciousness of

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[18] Pradip Thomas, *Communication for Social Change: Context, Social Movements and the Digital* (New Delhi, IN: Sage Publications India, 2019), 93.

[19] Anna Wickham, *That Old Time Religion: The Influence of West and Central African Religious Culture on the Music of the Azusa Street Revival* (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona 2014), 5.

[20] Douglas E. Thompson, *Richmond's Priests and Prophets: Race, Religion, and Social Change in the Civil Rights Era* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2017), 2.

America. One of the reasons they had success in fighting for the rights of black Americans was because they were organized. This meant they had to come together and meet so that they were on the same page. Social change started to take place because there were not only black people but also white Americans that helped in the fight for justice. Biblically, there was social injustice among the Israelites when they were in Egyptian bondage for four-hundred years. Factors like slavery, unequal opportunities, and even racism will always create need for change when it impacts the well-being of human beings. There is a biblical and theological responsibility for the Church to be a part of positive social change that will help and not hurt those in society.

The culture of Church has changed over time due to some social changes that have occurred. When a society starts to adopt and accept norms and values that are not consistent with the Word of God it can have an influence on how people see the Church. "Mainline denominations find themselves in a more crowded religious marketplace, which now includes a growing group of other religious traditions, as well as a rapidly expanding group of Nones—those who do not identify with any religious group."[21] There are many competing factors that the Church must face in this ever evolving and changing world. Alternative religions that do not believe in Christ are constantly emerging and growing. With all these factors and options to choose from, it is not an absolute that people will choose the Christian Church. There was time when the moral construct of certain societies would not widely accept everything that was on the horizon; however,

[21] James Hudnut-Beumler, Mark Silk, and Andrew Walsh, eds., *The Future of Mainline Protestantism in America* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2019), 21.

changes to laws and social acceptance has given people free range to decide what and who they identify with.

One of the greatest factors that has created social change was the Covid-19 pandemic. The landscape of the world and even the church has been greatly impacted. "The Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in increased challenges to health and welfare."[22] In the last few years millions of people have died as a result of Covid. In 2019, when Covid was first detected no one assumed that it would turn out to be so deadly and claim so many lives. It exposed the health care gaps in the U.S. in greater detail. The health care systems in the United States have never benefited those who live in impoverished communities. To have adequate health coverage, an individual must have a health care plan that can provide what it is as it relates to cost. There were some people who received good health treatment when they contracted Covid because they could afford the best medical services. Then there were those individuals who could handle the cost of staying in the hospital long enough to receive proper care.

The Covid-19 pandemic caused economic stress to societies globally. In March of 2022, when stay at home orders were enacted it created an economic ripple across the country. The restaurant industry for example was greatly impacted by the pandemic. People could not physically go inside and sit down to eat which affected sales for those restaurants. Some restaurants shifted to curbside pick-ups and some of the smaller and independent chains could not make the transition. Those small businesses overall shutdown and many never recovered from the devastation. These business owners with families had their lives interrupted because of the social change that was created by an

[22] Katherine Aumer, Michael A. Erickson, and Eli Tsukayama, "Social Factors Related to Depression during COVID-19," *Open Health* 4, no. 1 (2023), https://dx.doi.org/10.1515/ohe-2022-0030.

infectious disease that spread like wildfire throughout the world. The global economy was hit hard and especially those economies in third world nations.

Covid also caused social anxiety due to the shutdown orders that were once in place. Psychologically speaking, the shutdown impeded the way of life for many. It interfered with the social interactions of people. The human being was never created to be isolated or alone. Genesis 2:18 states, "Then the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner." When a person is socially isolated from others, especially those whom they have regularly been around it can be a difficult situation to adjust to. The shutdown stopped people from gathering in houses of worship. For some who did not have family in the proximity of where they lived the Church became a community of family for them. Many Churches suffered socially and financially during the pandemic. Some Churches closed and even pastors changed professions during the pandemic.

The culture of the Church has shifted dramatically since Covid and people would rather watch the worship service online. Parker offers this thought, "Whether valuing these quieter routines, or seeing the jagged bones of the social more clearly, Covid-19 has made us ask questions about what we want to return to."[23] People have returned to social events, like basketball and football games. Restaurants are now full again with people sitting down to eat and fellowship. Airplanes are packed with people traveling all over the globe. Yet the Church is one of those places from a gathering in person perspective that people have not fully returned to. It can be argued that before the pandemic many churches had experienced a decline in membership. That still does not explain in detail

[23] Martin Parker, ed., *Life After COVID-19: The Other Side of Crisis* (Bristol, UK: Bristol University Press, 2020), 6.

why some choose to watch services online as opposed to physically coming to the sanctuary. Watching service online has opened opportunities for the Gospel to reach across the world but it will never replace the value of corporate worship.

Social Ecology

Social ecology is an important component to the field of study within sociology. "Social ecology as a critical social theory was originally founded by Murray Bookchin and emphasizes the complexity of relationships between people and nature and the importance of establishing more mutualistic social structures that take account of these relationships."[24] What happens in nature can have great consequences for human beings. Global warming is taking place all over the world and it should be taken very seriously. When occurrences in nature take place like tornadoes, it can cause destruction to communities. These occurrences will impact people's lives and livelihoods. When homes are destroyed in tornadoes or other weather incidents it causes great economic hardship. Some people do not have proper insurance in some communities that might push them to relocate because they cannot afford to rebuild where they are. This leads to families being uprooted and they must adjust to a new social environment.

Massey and Brodmann state, "environmental circumstances are especially important in understanding outcomes among human beings, given the complexity of their genome and the importance of learning in shaping their behavior."[25] Behavior is

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[24] Anna Grichting, and Michele Zebich-Knos, eds., *The Social Ecology of Border Landscapes* (London, UK: Anthem Press, 2017), 2.

[25] Douglas S. Massey and Stefanie Brodmann, *Spheres of Influence: The Social Ecology of Racial and Class Inequality* (New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation, 2014), 2.

important to a society because what is considered acceptable will begin to shape the cultural norm. If a person for example lives in a high pollution area the pollutions can cause physical health problems to humans. This in return can lead to mental health challenges in any given community. As mentioned earlier there are some who do not have the economic capital to seek proper treatment. This shapes the psychological make-up of the people living in that environment. When individuals feel left out or do not believe they are cared for it leads to behavior that is detrimental for them and their community. That is why crime rates are very high in communities that are low-income areas. All these factors can push people to leave the area where they have developed a social network.

The question now becomes how the Church fits into this concept of social ecology of looking at environmental, weather, and nature related issues. Hart offers this, "One can hardly avoid the conclusion that as long as religion was central to human life, there was no ecological crisis even if there were minor degradations of the natural environment."[26] Hart is arguing that human beings are responsible for some of the nature related and environmental challenges that the earth faces. Thus, the responsibility of the Church is to make sure that society knows that God holds humanity responsible for how it has treated the earth. Genesis 2:15 states, "The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it." This shows that God gave humans the responsibility to look after the earth and due to some of the things that have occurred in the atmosphere at the hands of humanity. It is no wonder there are issues of global

[26] John Hart, ed., *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Religion and Ecology* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, 2017), 3.

warming. Humans for centuries have mistreated the earth and have not adequately taken care of the God-given duties that have been entrusted.

> One can hardly avoid the conclusion that as long as religion was central to human life, there was no ecological crisis even if there were minor degradations of the natural environment. The environmental crisis that we face today is due most of all, if not wholly, to the desacralization of both man and Nature and the preeminence of science and technology in which the religious and spiritual significance of Nature is considered irrelevant or even unreal and scientifically meaningless. The crisis is the result of man trying to "live by bread alone." To cure the fatal disease that is causing the present crisis, it is necessary first to discover the cause of this disease and then seek a cure. The major cause is the marginalization of the spiritual dimension of human life, combined with the rejection of the spiritual dimension of Nature, which is then relegated to the status of a complex machine.[27]

Bergmann offers a unique position on the concept of ecology and God. "States of "good" weather that enhanced the human ecology of the community could be interpreted as expressions of God's love and care, while states of "bad" weather, which threatened agriculture and survival and damaged the social structure, could be interpreted as expressions of anger and punishment for misbehavior in the human community."[27] Bergmann is suggesting that in biblical times weather was a sign of God's favor or disfavor for the people. In the book of Genesis, this example in seen in chapters six through nine when God floods the earth. The familiar story of Noah and his ark is well known biblical narrative. Due to the wickedness of mankind God allowed it to rain forty days and forty nights. There are weather related events that take place that man has no bearing on or influenced it in anyway. Humanity and the earth need nature that is suitable for sustainable living conditions to survive.

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[27] Sigurd Bergmann, *Weather, Religion, and Climate Change* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2021), 81.

Social ecology is a valuable study for the Church to consider. Nature and weather environments can have an impact on where people live. People change geographical locations due to the climate of weather. Changing locations for those who have membership to a church in the area where they reside means in most cases leaving that congregation. Overtime, this affects church membership and attendance. It is not always easy for people and families to find a new church home right away. One can move to an area where there is no church in the proximity that fits their cultural perspective. There are many components to social ecology that have an impact on human life and some that have been observed in this document. Although there are some things in nature that are beyond the realm of human capability and comprehension, human beings can be responsible for environmental issues that affect the environment.

Conclusion

The problem within the context where I serve is the lack of attendance and participation in corporate worship. The title of this project is a "Model For Maintaining Corporate Worship Despite Life's Circumstances." I believe if the people go through this model they will have a greater knowledge and appreciation of worship and an increased participation in attendance. Worship is key for Christian believers' relationship with God. Therefore, it is essential that the people of God continue to grow and be in communion with God by coming together in worship.

The interdisciplinary that has been chosen for this document is sociology. Sociology is the study of groups and people within a society. Bankston again states, "Sociologists study social life. This means that they concern themselves with the social

groups that exist apart from the individuals within them, into which people are born and out of which they die."[28] The reason sociology is applicable to this project is because it gives an overview into social conditions and settings that impact and shape people's lives. Cultural, ethnic and environment can have influence on the way in which individuals see God. The way one sees God will determine how they respond in their devotion and service to God.

As mentioned earlier the "Journal of Applied Social Sciences" argues that factors societies must contend with "are demographic, political, economic, social, cultural, technological, and environmental challenges."[29] The purpose of this research is to be centered around creating an awareness on the importance of coming together to worship God. There are caveats that must be considered that can hinder human beings from convening in a space of worship. For example, a family that wants to go to a particular church may not have adequate transportation to get there. This would create an economic issue that would hinder people from going to a particular church.

Religion helps to form different groups in society whether they are Christian or not. Veronique and Woods highlight that, "sociology of post secularity views religion as an autonomous actor in society."[30] The concept of having freedom of religion is true in the United States, but that is not the case in some countries in the world. The same can be said about individual family groups even in the U.S. that being in a particular family may not give a person full autonomy to select what religion. The role that the Church plays

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[28] Carl L. Bankston, *Sociology Basics: Magill's Choice* (Pasadena, CA: Salem Press, 2000), 2.

[29] Spalter-Roth, "Association for Applied and Clinical Sociology," 1.

[30] Altglas and Wood, *Bringing Back the Social into the Sociology of Religion*, 2.

within a society especially in the United States is not just one of religiosity but that brings moral awareness. Dart's take is this, "beyond the importance of meeting spiritual needs, the Church historically has been a type of social barometer for determining the types of national values and morals needed within the various cultures in most western societies."[31] The disciplines of sociology that have been investigated in this research are social organization, social psychology, social change, and human ecology. These several areas of study will help to provide insight to the various sociological factors that can determine and impact how individuals interact that will influence the way they might worship God.

[31] Dart, "Who Shall Separate Us?" 1.

CHAPTER SIX

PROJECT ANAYLSIS

Introduction

The context observed is the Lane Tabernacle CME Church, located at 910 North Newstead Avenue, St. Louis, Missouri. The history of Lane Tabernacle spans from 1898 to the present. It is currently positioned between Enright Avenue and Culver Way, also known as Hodiamont Track, within the independent city of St. Louis, Missouri. This city is situated near the Mississippi and Missouri rivers.

The goal of this project was to help the membership gain a better understanding of the relevance and importance of corporate worship. There are a few outcomes I aimed to achieve through this project. One perspective I hoped to learn about is from individuals who do not believe the gathering of saints is significant. This is vital because it will assist me in assessing why some people feel disengaged from attending church. Not everyone has the same reasons for their absence, so it is crucial to identify those differentiating factors. The issue at Lane Tabernacle CME Church, as stated in earlier chapters, is the lack of in-person gatherings for corporate worship. Every chapter written in this document has been key to the overall outcome of this project.

The biblical passage that was used is Hebrews 10:19-25, which states:

> Therefore, my friends, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain (that is, through his flesh), and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

> Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching (Heb. 10:19-25).

This passage of scripture serves as the foundation for the Doctor of Ministry project in several ways. This project examines the lack of corporate worship within a local congregation. There are various factors that can prevent individuals from participating or gathering with the people of God. Sickness, loss, pandemics, fear, and numerous other circumstances can affect this. Hebrews 10:19-25 addresses the absence of people coming together in the sanctuary or meeting place for worship. The authorship of Hebrews is unknown and has been debated for centuries. However, the authorship is not of primary importance; rather, it is the message the writer conveys to these scattered Jewish people who faced what seemed to be insurmountable pressure in their realities. They needed a worship experience that was God-driven to help them navigate through various situations. Hughes Oliphant states, "worship is at the center of our existence, at the heart of our reason for being."[1] The significance of Hebrews 10:19-25 to this project lies in its focus on the issue of people neglecting to engage in united worship.

The historical movement I chose to investigate for this Doctor of Ministry project is the Azusa Street revival. This movement began in 1906, taking place in Los Angeles, California, and became a phenomenon that attracted people from all over. The revival was viewed as a sign of the gifts the Holy Spirit bestowed, evident in the speaking in tongues of a small group of individuals who gathered one evening. This movement eventually transformed into an international attraction. It also sparked controversy about

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[1] Hughes Oliphant Old, *Worship: Reformed According to Scripture* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 2.

whether this type of worship was acceptable to God. The debate continues today regarding what emerged from this movement and its overall impact on religion.

The Azusa Street revival is significant to my project due to its historical relevance in worship. This project primarily focuses on the importance of sustaining corporate worship. For the Azusa revival to occur, it relied on people gathering in a worship space. There are nuances to the movement, such as the Pentecostal perspective that can be debated in relation to worship style. The crucial point is that something transformational happens when the people of God unite. A close examination of this movement helps connect the dots regarding the impact and power of corporate worship. The elements that contributed to shaping the Azusa Street Revival have been studied to gain a deeper understanding of its role and contribution to worship.

A theological foundation was established to demonstrate the importance of assembling in worship for the body of Christ. Worship began in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve, as described in Genesis, chapter two. Adam and Eve were in communion with God in the Garden of Eden; being in communion with God is an essential part of worship. Packiam mentions, "that our worship together witnesses to the world that there is more than what we can see, more than this moment, more than what we can accomplish on our own."[2] Adam and Eve's worship was disrupted by sin. Their disobedience in eating from the tree of life interrupted their fellowship with God. Numerous factors can cause disruptions to the flow of worship in a believer's life.

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[2] Glenn Packiam, *Worship and the World to Come Exploring Christian Hope in Contemporary Worship* (Westmont, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020), 10.

It is important to note that in establishing a theological foundation, several components must be investigated. Understanding what worship is and its origins is essential for creating a starting point to explore the various elements that comprise worship. Acts of worship must be studied to grasp what actions are considered worship. Both individual and corporate worship should be examined to clarify why people should not neglect coming together to glorify God. This research has explored these perspectives to present a theology of worship. When individuals truly and authentically understand what worship entails, they will develop a greater sense of devotion and reverence for God. The goal of this document is to raise awareness of the significance of corporate worship.

The discipline selected for the interdisciplinary chapter is sociology. Sociology is the study of groups and individuals within a society. Bankston states, "Sociologists study social life. This means that they focus on the social groups that exist apart from the individuals within them, into which people are born and out of which they die."[3] The reason sociology applies to this project is that it provides insights into social conditions and settings that impact and shape people's lives. Cultural, ethnic, and environmental factors can influence how individuals perceive God. One's view of God will determine their response in devotion and service to God.

The *Journal of Applied Social Sciences* mentions that societal factors must contend with "are demographic, political, economic, social, cultural, technological, and environmental challenges."[4] The intent of this document is to center around creating

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[3] Carl L. Bankston, *Sociology Basics. Magill's Choice* (Pasadena, CA: Salem Press, 2000), 2.

[4] Spalter-Roth, "Association for Applied and Clinical Sociology," 1.

awareness of the importance of coming together to worship God. However, there are nuances that must be considered which can hinder human beings from convening in a space of worship. For example, a family that wants to attend a particular church may not have adequate transportation to get there. This creates an economic issue that can prevent people from going to that church. Each chapter that has been researched and written is crucial to the overall construction of "A Model For Maintaining Corporate: Despite Life's Circumstances."

Methodology

Participants are individuals who are members of the Lane Tabernacle CME Church and are over the age of eighteen. A total of eighteen people committed to the six-week teaching process. Participants completed pre- and post-questionnaires, along with journal entries and weekly questions after each teaching session. The material used for teaching comes from the biblical foundations research conducted in this doctoral document. The biblical passage I have chosen to observe, as previously stated, is from the book of Hebrews 10:19-25 (NRSV). All sessions were conducted via Zoom, and the last fifteen minutes of each session, which involved group discussion, were recorded. All Participants completed an informed consent. The content focused on the purpose, requirements for participation, procedures, human subject, risks, benefits, voluntary, and confidentiality.

Pre-Survey Questionnaires

1. What does worship mean to you? This question helps to get a sense of each participants view of what worship is to them and how that view might impact the way they worship.

2. How often do you attend regular worship services? This question provides information on each participants frequency in attendance for public worship.

3. What do you hope to gain from this six-week training on corporate worship? This question helps to identify each participants goals and possible reasons for being apart of the study.

4. Do you believe in the authenticity of the Bible? This question is extremely important to the study that is being conducted for two reasons. The first reason is if the participant does not believe in the authenticity of the Bible then the session may not have an impact on them. Secondly if they do believe that scripture is true then the training sessions should be valuable to them.

5. Has your definition of worship changed over time? This question is designed to see if and why a participant has changed the way they view worship overtime. Life's circumstances can change the way an individual looks at worship.

6. Do you believe taking this class will enlarge your understanding of the importance of corporate worship? This question is focusing on whether or not each participant has a desire to become more knowledgeable about corporate worship.

Post-Survey Questionnaires

1. What does worship mean to you? This question is a follow up to the pre questionnaire and is designed to see if how a participant feels about worship has changed since being apart of the class.

2. How often do you attend regular worship services? This question is designed to see if there has been a change in the regularity of being a part of corporate worship since taking this class.

3. What did you gain from this six-week training on corporate worship? This question is designed to get a general sense of how each participant felt about the class.

4. Has your definition of worship changed since taking this class? This question is designed to measure how each participant intellectualizes worship since being apart of this study.

5. Has taking this class enlarged your understanding of the importance of corporate worship? This question is designed to measure if the biblical teaching on corporate worship has impacted each participants awareness of what scripture teaches.

6. Will you make a more concerted effort to be apart of corporate worship? This question is designed to measure if being apart of the six-week training has motivated the participants to have an increase in attendance in public worship.

A Model For Maintaining Corporate Worship: Despite Life's Circumstances Weekly Journal Entry.

The participants were asked to describe what was valuable after each session each week. This journal entry question will be standard for all six weeks, giving participants an opportunity to chronicle what was most valuable to them about each session weekly.

Group Discussion Questions

Participants will be asked three questions each week. These questions are designed to evaluate the effectiveness of each lesson on a weekly basis. 1. How did this week's lesson provide greater insight into corporate worship? 2. How did this week's lesson inspire you to participate in corporate worship more consistently? 3. Is there anything about this week's lesson that was unclear? 4. How could this week's lesson have been explained more concisely and effectively?

Project Calendar

Week One - February 5, 2025

Pre-questionnaires (10 minutes)

Introduction to the biblical text Hebrews 10:19-25.

The goal of week one is to present and show the connection between the people of that day and their need for worship (50 minutes)

Questions and responses (15 minutes)

Weekly journal entry

Week Two - February 12, 2025

Training on Hebrews 10:19

The goal for the week is to show the boldness that is required sometimes in moments of great trials, the pressure that comes with them, and to establish the value of the worship space (60 minutes)

Questions and responses (15 minutes)

Weekly journal entry

Week Three - February 19, 2025

Training on Hebrews 10:20 30 (minutes)

The goal of the week is to show a relationship with Christ is needed to truly worship

Training on Hebrews 10:21 (30 minutes)

Questions and responses (15 minutes)

Weekly journal entry

Week Four - February 26, 2025

Training on Hebrews 10:22 (60 minutes)

The goal of the week is to establish the right approach for worship

Questions and responses (15 minutes)

Weekly journal entry

Week Five - March 5, 2025

Training on Hebrews 10:23 (60 minutes)

The goal of the week is to show the participants from a biblical perspective, God is not concerned with ritualistic worship but the heart in which one worships.

Questions and responses (15 minutes)

Weekly journal entry

Week Six – March 12, 2025

Training on Hebrews 10:24-25 (50 minutes)

The goal of the week is to give a final push on why corporate worship is so valuable in the life of the believer

Post-questionnaire (10 minutes)

Questions and responses (15 minutes)

Implementation

Week One

Week one opened with an introduction to the biblical text of Hebrews 10:19-25. The opening session began with a prayer led by one of the participants, followed by their completion of the pre-questionnaire. The goal of week one was to illustrate the connection between the people of that day and their need for worship. Several key points were highlighted from the teaching material for week one. The first point provided context regarding the people in the biblical passage. Nero was the emperor during this period, creating a dangerous time for Christians. Cities in Rome had been set on fire under Nero's direction, and Christians were blamed for it. This situation forced early

believers to be on the run for their lives. Christians were scattered throughout Rome, fleeing and hiding. Even the emphasis on the Levitical cult in Hebrews does not imply that the original recipients were exclusively Jewish. Both Jewish and Gentile Christians were integrated into a community that required an acceptance of the Old Testament as a record of divine revelation.

Another point that was raised is the literary context and theme of Hebrews being centered on the superiority of Christ. The writer of Hebrews lists major prophets from the Old Testament and explains how Jesus is greater than them all. Jesus is the key to worshiping God in the New Testament. The writer of this epistle places a strong emphasis on the supremacy of Christ and the priestly order of Old Testament prophets. In Hebrews, Christ is central and essential to understanding the call to worship. Due to the danger and uncertainty of the times, these early believers moved away from gathering in the sanctuary or temple. This is why the author emphasizes the importance of Jesus as the high priest.

As a result of their suffering, some wondered why going to the temple to worship was important, even when their lives were in danger. Others had fallen into the habit of not valuing worship highly because they had grown accustomed to not gathering. The essence of Hebrews is to help guide these believers back to a relational place in their lives with God, as they had been separated due to the immense weight they had been under. These points will be elaborated on during the hour-long teaching session. Week one concluded with group discussions followed by prayer.

Week Two

Week two began with a prayer to open the session, led by one of the participants. The training during week two focused on verse nineteen of Hebrews chapter ten, which states, “Therefore, my friends, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus.” The writer begins this verse by establishing a relationship with the audience. By addressing the early believers as friends, the verse takes on a personal tone, suggesting an intimate connection with the people. The writer affirms that they have confidence to enter the sanctuary through the blood of Jesus. One of the goals for week two is to illustrate the boldness needed during times of great trials and the accompanying pressure. While being bold or courageous is not always easy, it was essential for the Hebrew people.

Another goal was to establish the value of the worship space. Further examination of verse nineteen revealed the significant importance of access to the sanctuary or temple. The sanctuary was a gathering place for worship, and due to the brutality against Christians during this period, they lacked the confidence to enter. The people should have confidence to enter the temple through the blood of Jesus. Their assurance is not based on their own strength to enter, but on the certainty that Christ has provided for them. In other words, all boldness, confidence, and assurance come from Jesus and what He has done for the body of Christ through the shedding of His blood. Week two will end with group discussions and prayer.

Week Three

Week Three began with a prayer led by a participant. The lesson for Week Three focused on verse twenty, which states, "by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh." The writer references the Christian relationship with God, established through Christ. Jesus is the new way for people to approach God, replacing animal sacrifices. A relationship with Jesus is essential for having a relationship with God. This is the overarching message that the author emphasizes in this verse. One of the goals for Week Three is to demonstrate that a relationship with Christ is necessary to truly worship.

The Hebrew people were also receiving an invitation to have a relationship with Jesus from the writer. The author did not assume that all of them were saved. In a sense, verses nineteen and twenty serve as an introduction to Christ and a reintroduction to others in that community. The term "the way" was one with which both Jews and Gentiles were commonly familiar. The Christian faith was known or referred to as "the way." The writer uses this language so that the readers of this book would easily recognize the message presented. Christians were targets of persecution, yet the author invites people to become part of the ongoing struggle. Verse twenty illustrates that Jesus' blood was shed for the cause of following God's commandments, assuring the people of their confidence in what Christ had accomplished for them.

Verse twenty-one was also noted in week three. It states, "and since we have a great priest over the house of God." The writer is further supporting their claim of the supremacy of Christ. Jesus is in charge of the house of God, and God has placed all authority and responsibility in His hands over the kingdom. Jesus is the ultimate example

of leadership among the body of believers. No one else could accomplish the will of God in the way that Christ has for the people. He willingly laid down His life and allowed His blood to be shed to cover the sins of God's people. The writer wants the readers to truly connect with the role that Christ plays in their spiritual lives. Week three concluded with group discussions and prayer.

Week Four

Week four began with a prayer led by a participant. In week four, verse twenty-two was examined. Verse twenty-two states, "Let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and bodies washed with pure water." The goal for week four is to establish the right approach for worship. To have a "true heart" means that one must approach God through Jesus with sincerity and without a hidden agenda. The writer invites the Hebrews, especially those who have had no previous relationship with God, to come to the Lord. The author outlines how to build a relationship with God through having a "true heart." The people were also required to approach with "full assurance of faith," which simply means that they needed to have complete confidence in the promises of God. They needed to believe that everything God promised in His word would come true in their lives.

The term "evil conscience" refers to a mind that is not aligned with the principles of God. The writer admonishes the people to cleanse their minds of any impure thoughts or concepts that do not conform to Christian principles. There were bound to be individuals preoccupied with the climate of immorality surrounding the community, easily swayed to act according to the prevailing mindset. It is easy to adapt one's thinking

to the environment one finds themselves in, which is why the author encourages resisting the temptation of devious thoughts. If the people were to approach Christ, they needed to come with a mind focused on the precepts of a godly nature. Week four concluded with group discussions and prayer.

Week Five

Week five opened with a prayer led by one of the participants. During this week, verse twenty-three of Hebrews chapter ten will be studied. Verse twenty-three states, "Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful." The writer of Hebrews encourages the people not to give in to those who are trying to push them back into their former way of ritualistic worship. The goal for week six is to show the participants that, from a biblical perspective, God is not concerned with ritualistic worship but with the heart in which one worships.

The expression "the confession of our hope" is significant to address in verse twenty-three. To confess is to simply acknowledge or profess a statement about something or someone. The writer urges the people to remember what has been echoed throughout the history of Christianity and what has been claimed about Christ. This becomes a personal confession for the Hebrews to affirm their beliefs about Jesus in their own lives. The author has already mentioned in the previous verse what Christ has done for the people of God and how He is their High Priest. It is now up to the people to determine if they genuinely believe what is being declared to them. The writer is confident that if the people accept the truth of what Jesus has done for them, they can hold on. Their hope is placed in God through Jesus, who has been given authority over

them. The hope is that they will eventually be delivered from their harsh circumstances. This hope in Christ will help the people not to give up. Week five ended with group discussions and prayer.

Week Six

Week six began with a prayer led by a participant, followed by the participants filling out the post-questionnaire. In week six, verses twenty-four and twenty-five of Hebrews chapter ten were examined. These verses state, "And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching." These last two verses represent the author's final instructions to the readers and hearers of this epistle. Everything has been laid out in the preceding verses to explain why these early Christians should have confidence in Christ. These verses within this pericope serve as a final encouragement to bring the people back to a place of united worship and fellowship. The goal of week six is to reinforce the importance of corporate worship in the life of the believer.

In verse twenty-five, which is the final verse to be examined, the writer states, "not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see that day approaching." Many had turned away from gathering to worship God. Some had become afraid of publicly displaying their faith and belief in Christ because they would be labeled as those who had burned cities and houses in Rome and the surrounding areas. The writer informs the readers of Hebrews that it is unacceptable not to participate in public worship, which is why the invitation to enter the

sanctuary is given in verse nineteen. Corporate worship is not optional; it is a requirement laid upon these early saints who were under tremendous pressure and scrutiny. This is also an urgent plea to the people, as the writer looks toward the day of Christ's return, and it is essential for them to be in a right relationship with God. Week six will end with group discussions and prayer.

Summary of Learning

Group Discussion Questions/Recordings and Response

The first question was how did this week's lesson provide greater insight into corporate worship? In all six weeks that this question was asked, there were only a few responses. One participant believed that in week one, the lesson helped them put into perspective the meaning of corporate worship. This participant thought that the teaching in week one gave them a better understanding of why the people of God need to come together to honor the Lord. It is reasonable to conclude from this question that most participants had a working knowledge of what corporate worship is prior to being a part of this study.

The second question was how did this week's lesson inspire you to participate in corporate worship more consistently? This question seemed to capture the participants' attention over the six-week course. One participant made a political connection to Nero, the emperor of Rome during the writing of the book of Hebrews. This participant viewed the current political climate in America through this lens. They concluded that there will always be unfair factors in government; however, these issues should not prevent people

from gathering and worshiping God. This motivated the participant to seek greater consistency in corporate worship.

Another participant internalized this question as a relationship matter with God. This individual stated, “If a person’s relationship with God is right, then they should have a desire to worship with other believers.” This person frequently attends Sunday morning services yet felt that they could be even more consistent. A few other participants agreed that they could be more involved in worship as well as more engaged in other church-related activities that foster bringing people together. These individuals felt stirred to be consistent on a regular basis.

There was another group of participants who believed that the COVID-19 pandemic caused them to be lethargic in their worship of God in the sanctuary. They had become accustomed to online platforms like Zoom and Facebook. The teaching and training on biblical and corporate worship prompted them to truly evaluate this question. One individual mentioned, “this teaching model helped bring to light God’s desire for His people to worship together.” This was the overall consensus among this group of participants, and they stated, “this pushed them to want to be more consistent in their corporate worship.”

The third question was is there anything about this week’s lesson that did not make sense? Throughout the six weeks, there were no responses to this question. It is reasonable to deduce from the lack of responses to question three that the participants believed the lessons made sense to them each week. One of the goals in presenting this teaching was to ensure that it was comprehensible and that the participants could understand.

The fourth question is how could this week's lesson have been explained in a more concise and effective way? There were no critiques of this question in any of the weeks. During the final session, some individuals believed that the six-week training on "A Model For Maintaining Corporate Worship: Despite Life's Circumstances" was timely and exactly what Lane Tabernacle needed. The entire class agreed with that perspective, believing that everything was explained in a concise and effective manner.

Pre-Survey Questionnaires Responses

The first question was, what does worship mean to you? All the participants responded to the pre-survey questions, and a few were selected for observation in this document. One participant viewed worship as when God's people come together to share all that God has done and will do. This individual believes that worship consists of scripture, the preaching of God's word, and singing songs. They also perceive worship as a means of personal growth as a Christian.

Another participant viewed worship in several ways: "A specified time set aside to connect with God, honor Him, and give thanks for His blessings. " This participant also understood worship as obedience to God and living according to His desires. A third participant believed that worship is the coming together of people of faith as well as non-believers to hear and be uplifted by the preached word of God. They thought that when non-believers gather with those who believe in the Christian faith, it provides an opportunity for them to witness how true believers worship. Some participants had similar responses regarding what worship means to them, while others offered differing perspectives for questioning one another.

The second question was how often participants attend regular worship services. All participants responded with varying answers. One group indicated they attend in-person worship on a weekly basis. Another group attended a few times a week, while a third group participated only in virtual worship. Some worshiped online due to health challenges, while others had become comfortable watching services online as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. This question revealed the different components of how individuals within a local congregation engage in corporate worship.

The third question was, what do you hope to gain from this six-week training on corporate worship? All of the participants in this study answered this question, and several responses have been selected for observation in this document, in no specified order. One participant hoped to increase their knowledge of God. They wanted this class to help them find ways to encourage others to become believers in Christ. This individual expressed a desire to learn how to be more obedient to God's will for their life.

Another individual wanted to know what others had experienced in their worship journeys. They hoped to learn about the difference between in-person and online worship. This participant was seeking scriptures that would support the biblical mandate and importance of corporate worship.

A third individual sought a deeper understanding of corporate worship and its significance. They wished to learn how to handle fellow congregants who tried to impose their style or method of praising God on them. This participant remarked, “Just because I don’t dance and shout doesn’t mean I am not praising God. When I think of where God brought me from, I thank Him. " All the participants aimed to gain insights from the study that was conducted.

The fourth question was: Do you believe in the authenticity of the Bible? All of the participants answered this question unanimously with a yes. Although they all believed in the authenticity of the Bible, this study shows that there were different understandings and interpretations of how each individual views the Bible. Those differences were revealed in the previous questions through varying responses. This indicates that people can believe in God but see Him in numerous ways.

The fifth question was: Has your definition of worship changed over time? Once again, the participants answered this question. Most agreed that their definition changed over time in a few ways. They noticed their understanding evolve from childhood to their teenage years, and then from their teenage years to adulthood, which provided a different perspective. One participant stated, "As a child their parents made them go to church, and now, out of obedience to God as an adult I go." This question highlights the reality that a person's understanding of worship can evolve over time.

The sixth question was: Do you believe taking this class will enhance your understanding of the importance of corporate worship? Some participants believed that this study would increase their understanding of corporate worship's significance. Others hoped for this but revealed that they could not fully determine its effectiveness until the class had been completed.

Post Survey Questionnaires

The first question was: What does worship mean to you? All participants answered this question, and most gave the same response as in their pre-question. However, a few responses differed from their pre-question answers. One participant

believes that worship is honoring and thanking God for everything He has given them. “My worship leads me to remember how faithful God is in my life and to give Him the praise He deserves for His faithfulness." Another participant believed that worship was “fellowshipping with their Lane Tabernacle family and hearing the word of God together. Gathering in corporate worship in the sanctuary and experiencing the move of the Holy Spirit with fellow congregants.”

The second question was: How often do you attend regular worship services? All participants answered with the same response as they did with the pre-question. The third question was: What did you gain from this six-week training on corporate worship? All participants answered this question. One participant stated, “This training was very informative and gave me insight into the concepts that I had not really thought about. I realized that I need to reach deeper into the word and determine what God really wants from me in this life." Another participant said, “I have more insight of the importance of corporate worship. After taking this class I feel that I give more thought to my mindset when going to worship. Realizing now that I need to prepare myself for worship.”

The fourth question was: Has your definition of worship changed since taking this class? All participants answered in the same manner as they did in their pre-questions. The fifth question was: Has taking this class enlarged your understanding of the importance of corporate worship? All participants answered yes. The sixth question was: Will you make a more concerted effort to participate in corporate worship? All participants committed to making a greater effort to attend and be part of corporate worship.

Weekly Journal Entry - Week One Response

The participants were asked to describe each week what was valuable after each session. A participant from each week was selected. They noted: “Having been a member of my church all my life, I thought I was familiar with the concept of corporate worship. The members of the church that I respected were people who always showed a faith in God and His Son, Jesus. My parents were very devout and taught us that our belief in God was essential living a life that would be pleasing to God. When the pandemic hit, I watched the service via Zoom or Facebook but I missed coming to the sanctuary a great deal. I was back as soon as the pastor told us that we could return. My spirit is uplifted when I am in the presence of other believers.”

Week Two Response

“Every time we come to God's house we should have faith & a clean heart. We should have a heart with an assurance of faith. We can not please God without faith. I feel this is something we have to continue to remind ourselves. Especially when unpleasant circumstances happen to us. We need fellowship with other believers. We should be sprinkled clean in our consciousness. If there is anything in our minds that isn't Christ like we need to cancel it out. This can impact our ability to worship. We must have personal time with God on a regular basis not just on Sundays. The enemy can distract us so we can't receive our blessing. An example of that is someone driving in an unsafe way that could irritate you on our way to church. It can makes us come into worship with an angry mood instead of coming with a thankful loving spirit. We cannot let anything

distract us & interfere with our worship to God! When our worship is right it helps with our communal worship. Preparation for worship & a clean mind helps our worship."

Week Three Response

"Sometimes God is doing something new in a new season. Sometimes we get into ritualistic worship. We do things out of routine rather than a true meaning of what we are doing. Sometimes we do programs the same way because that's the way it's always been done. It is difficult to change when we are use to doing things the same way but we should pray & ask God to give us a possible different way to make activities an evangelistic opportunity. I feel this is very important when we are working with our young people or trying to evangelize young people. It's difficult for those of us who have been doing activities the same way all the time. This is why we have to pray & ask God for his guidance in this season. We don't want to miss Jesus in what we are doing. We don't want to push people away because we are so ritualistic. We have to remember God will direct us in the way he wants us to go. We also should realize
our worshipping God is acknowledging who he is. We should be sincere in our praying, praising and giving as we worship God. We want to please him with our worship. That should be our ultimate goal."

Week Four Response

"We must work on ourselves. Most of us can see what others need to change but we can't see what we need to change. Be able to accept a new way of worship as long as it honors God. Make sure our worship is real. We must stop limiting God. We can't

expect the church to be the same as forty years ago. My mother would say we can't throw the baby out with the bath water. What that mean to me is don't get rid of everything but evaluate and keep what is still relevant in today church. When I became a CME in my thirties at Lane Tabernacle CME Church the senior saints had no problem having a talk with me about my responsibility as a member of God's church. They did it with love. Today, If I said something to a member about their responsibility it would create a major issue. Today I am grateful for the love shown to me, because of them I am truly a better person, and feel that God is please with me most of the time."

Week Five Response

"It is not the ritual that save us. I can remember when one of Lane's Pastor stops reciting the Affirmation of Faith ever Sunday, it was a major issue for many. Many of them probably didn't even know what it meant. It wasn't a problem for me. I grew up in a Baptist Church and became a CME in my thirties. Your worship is not my worship. Worship is acknowledgment God. Singing, Giving God honor/glory. Giving is a part of worship. My personal feeling is not giving is saying you don't trust God to take care of your needs. My pet peeve is you asking other to give and you are not giving. My Pastor makes it a point that the members see him giving his tithes and offering every Sunday. God is calling us in a new way. We all don't worship the same way.

Week Six Response

"There is a biblical reference for church attendance, Hebrews 10:25. We are encouraged to be evangelist for Christ. However, before we can be an evangelist, we

must love. Love disarms a person which can make them open to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We should not become so judgmental that we forget about the grace of God extended to us. We need to see there is a remnant of God's people doing what God wants us to do. Christ is the foundation on which we stand. The Word of God never changes it still tells us not to forsake the assembling of ourselves. This Word is still applicable for us today. When we follow this mandate, it demonstrates our obedience. Something powerful takes place when we come together. This is a model to be used not only at Lane Tabernacle, but worldwide. This Word of God is necessary to move people back to worship, as the Day is approaching."

The hypothesis for this project was that participants in a six-week training and teaching program would develop a better perspective on being present in worship services, which would in turn increase their attendance and participation. Based on the collected data, it is reasonable to conclude that the hypothesis was supported. The cognitive change I sought was a greater commitment to being present and more participatory in corporate worship. This commitment was declared by the members of Lane through group discussions, journal entries, and pre- and post-questionnaires.

Conclusion

As mentioned earlier, the context observed for this Doctor of Ministry project was the Lane Tabernacle CME Church. The objective of this research was to help the membership gain a better understanding of the relevance of corporate worship. There were several things I sought to learn from this project. One perspective I hoped to grasp was from individuals who do not believe that the gathering of saints is important. This is

vital because it will help me assess why some people might be disinterested in attending church. Not everyone has the same reason for not attending, so it is necessary to identify those differentiating factors. The problem at Lane Tabernacle CME Church was a lack of in-person gatherings for corporate worship. Every chapter conducted in this document has been pivotal to the overall outcome of this project.

The biblical chapter addresses Hebrews 10:19-25, which speaks to the absence of people gathering in the sanctuary or meeting place for worship. The author of Hebrews has never been definitively identified and has been the subject of debate for centuries. While authorship is interesting, the message the writer conveyed to those scattered Jewish people facing seemingly insurmountable pressure is of greater importance. They needed a God-driven worship in their lives to help them navigate various situations.

The historical portion of this document chosen for investigation in the Doctor of Ministry project is the Azusa Street revival. This movement began in 1906, taking place in Los Angeles, California, and became a phenomenon that attracted people from all over. The Azusa Street revival is significant to this project due to its historical relevance to worship. This project essentially addresses the importance of maintaining corporate worship. The occurrence of the Azusa revival depended on people gathering in a worship space.

The theological chapter of this research explores several elements of worship. Understanding what worship is and its origins is vital for establishing a foundation to examine the various components that constitute worship. Acts of worship are studied because they help clarify which actions are deemed to be worship. Both individual and corporate worship need to be observed to clearly illustrate why it is important for people

not to neglect gathering together to glorify God. This research considers multiple perspectives that contribute to a theology of worship. When people genuinely comprehend the essence of worship, they will develop a deeper sense of devotion and reverence for God. The intention of this document is to enhance awareness of the significance of corporate worship.

The discipline selected for the interdisciplinary chapter is sociology. Sociology is the study of groups and individuals within a society. The value of sociology's applicability to this project lies in its ability to provide insight into the social conditions and settings that impact and shape people's lives. Culture, ethnicity, and environment can influence how individuals perceive God.

The biggest takeaway from this project that I have learned is how to be "A Model for Maintaining Corporate Worship: Despite Life's Circumstances." In August 2022, my family and I moved from Kansas City to the Oakland, California area for me to pastor a church. We moved with the thought and anticipation of serving that particular congregation for many years. However, on Saturday, July 27th, 2024, at a conference that my church was hosting, I was informed that I was being sent to another pastoral assignment that would require my family and me to relocate once again. The assignment was not in the best interest of my family's needs, so I declined the offer to go and allowed my wife to keep her job. This led us to not have a church home.

I had no idea that at the beginning of my doctoral work, I would conclude it without a pastoral appointment. My family and I have become a walking embodiment of the very thing I have written about. We are navigating what it means to continue serving God amid challenging circumstances. It is one thing to have a theoretical perspective, but

to experience the existential reality gives a whole new meaning to “A Model For Maintaining Corporate Worship: Despite Life’s Circumstances.” This project has provided me not only with theory but also with evidence. I believe this project was a success for the members of Lane, given their responses documented in this research.

The inspiration for this research arose from concerns about how the church as a whole would look after the Covid-19 pandemic. While we cannot predict the nature of future pandemics, this model may serve as a tool or resource for both the church and society to maintain fellowship during challenging times. This model has the potential to benefit the church, families, and society at large. It can guide the church in teaching people the importance and value of worshiping together. It can help families by fostering togetherness in worship and emphasizing the family’s role in prioritizing God. In the future, should the opportunity arise, I would conduct in-person sessions for a more personal connection with those to whom the model is presented.

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